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Hamilton Gibson

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William Hamilton Gibson, Age 41

(The autograph was always written without lifting the pen, beginning with the last half of the "H" and ending with the first half)

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William Hamilton Gibson

Artist—Naturalist—Author

By

John Coleman Adams
Author of "Nature Studies in Berkshire," etc.

Illustrated

G. P. Putnam's Sons
New York and London
The Knickerbocker Press
1901

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THE MOTIVE

THREE men have done more than any others to inspire our generation with the love of nature. They are Henry D. Thoreau, John Burroughs, and William Hamilton Gibson. Thoreau, when the generation was young, challenged it to come out of doors, live in a shanty, and see as much of the world as he saw. John Burroughs, in later years, has acted as guide to a multitude of minds, eager to be "personally conducted" to field and forest. William Hamilton Gibson, besides winning many feet into those "highways and byways" whose charms he taught us to feel, was fortunate in his exceptional power to bring nature to the very eyes of men in the works of his pencil, with which he made luminous—literally "illustrated"—his pages. This alone would be a justification of some account of his life and work.

But in addition to this claim on the interest of the public, those who knew him are aware of others;—a personality of singular charm and forcefulness; a career quite marvelous in its swift and sure achievements; a genius as rare as it was versatile; a devotion to art and to study which fairly wore him out in its exactions on his energy; an ideal which instructs

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while it shames our sordidness and materialism. His personality will surely grow upon the American people as time gives a true perspective to his life and work. Already we can see something of his conspicuousness and his right to a place in the foremost group of our nature-prophets. In that great trio, Thoreau is the philosopher, Burroughs the poet and man of letters, Gibson the artist-naturalist. In these days when so many are entering into the inheritance which Gibson helped to secure, it is fitting that nature-lovers should hear the story of his fruitful life.

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WILLIAM HAMILTON GIBSON

CHAPTER I

A FORTUNATE BOYHOOD

TO be well-born is half of the battle of life ; and to have an environment which helps the life of the child and the youth is a good fraction of the other half. So that the man whose parentage and whose education are good is fortunate above his fellows, and well-assured of a successful issue to his life. Heredity and early environment—these are what the scientists call them—are as the building and the rigging of the ship. The best sailing-master can do little with an ill-built, ill-rigged vessel. There is much in the stock from which William Hamilton Gibson came, much in his education and early association, which explains his life and the way in which he lived it. He was born in Sandy Hook, Newtown, Connecticut, in a region where the lower Berkshire mountain-ranges break into irregular and crowded hills, green, picturesque, and restful. He has himself left a charming description of the old home and its immediate surroundings, in the chapter called "Summer" in "Pastoral Days."

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"Hometown (Sandy Hook), owing to some early faction, is divided into two sections, forming two distinct towns. One Newborough (Newtown), a hilltop hamlet, with its picturesque long street, a hundred feet in width, and shaded with great weeping elms that almost meet overhead ; and the other, Hometown proper (Sandy Hook), a picturesque little village in the valley, cuddling close around the foot of a precipitous bluff, known as Mt. Pisgah. A mile's distance separates the two centers. The old homestead is situated in the heart of Hometown, fronting on the main street. The house itself is a series of after-thoughts, wing after wing, gable after gable having clustered around the old nucleus as the growth of new generations necessitated new accommodation. Its outward aspect is rather modern, but the interior with its broad open fireplace and accessories in the shape of crane and firedogs, is rich with all the features of typical New England ; and the two gables of the main roof enclose the dearest old garret imaginable. . . . Looking through the dingy window between the maple-boughs, my eye extends over lawns and shrubberies three acres in extent,—a little park, overrun with paths in every direction, through ancient orchard and embowered dells, while far beyond are glimpses of the wooded knolls, the winding brook, and meadows dotted with waving willows, and farther still, the undulating farm."

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In such a spot Gibson was born October the fifth, 1850. His father was originally a Boston man, who finally removed to Brooklyn, though maintaining the home in the country, at Newtown.

The Gibson ancestry is one of no little interest, embracing as it does, in various branches, some of the most distinguished names in Eastern Massachusetts. The first American bearer of the name was John Gibson of Cambridge, whose coming to this country was at least as early as 1634, and who died in Cambridge in 1694 at the age of ninety-three years. His descendants remained for the most part in Massachusetts for several generations. Thomas Gibson of Townsend, Massachusetts, the grandfather of William Hamilton, by marriage with Frances Maria Hastings brought into the family line the famous Dana family, a connection of which his descendants were justly proud. The original Dana ancestor was also a Cambridge settler, Richard by name, who married Anne Bullard. His grandson, by his son Daniel (who married Naomi Crosswell), was Mr. Justice Richard Dana, whose death in 1772 deprived the patriots of those stormy days of one of their foremost and ablest leaders. Justice Dana was unquestionably at the head of the Massachusetts bar, an authority on the precedents in American cases more quoted by Story than any other pleader of his time. He is one of the figures in Hawthorne's sketch, given in his "Grandfather's Chair," of the episode in

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the drama of pre-Revolutionary agitation, when Andrew Oliver made oath to take no measures to enforce the Stamp Act. One of his brothers was Francis Dana, Chief Justice of Massachusetts, and ambassador to Russia, whose wife was Elizabeth Ellery, and whose son Richard Henry left a name always honorable in the history of American letters. Richard Dana's daughter Lydia married John Hastings, a descendant of both the famous John Cottons of Boston renown. Their daughter Frances M., married to Thomas Gibson, was the mother of Edmund Trowbridge Hastings Gibson, and grandmother of William Hamilton Gibson. It is no wonder that the latter should write to an inquiring friend:

"You ask whether I am a New Englander. Let me set your heart at rest by telling you that I am a way-back Puritan. The race has been petering out from old John Cotton down through a long list of historical men whom I am glad to own as ancestors. (I don't count some of the earlier Lords and Ladies to whom I trace my lineage—they are a pretty bad lot to my thinking.) I honor the humble names of several of my progenitors who lived and died in the love and respect of their fellow men, and have some reason to feel a little pride in being able to allude to Justice Richard Dana, of Massachusetts, as my great-great-grandfather, and a lineage which embraces the names of Washington Allston, Ellery Channing, and others

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equally noble and worthy ; and now it has come down to me in this branch of the family. Yes, I am New England to the *core*. No other place on earth will ever be so near and dear or carry me to loftier mountain tops."

From the old country home and its surroundings the lad of ten years went to a school which was probably as well-adapted to his temper and tastes as any which could have been selected. At any rate it was a school to which he became profoundly attached, and whose master he was to count among the dearest and closest friends of a lifetime. The "Gunn School," or the "Gunnery," as it came to be called, was one of the famous institutions of this country, a school which left its indelible mark upon many a boy whose maturity was to be eminent and useful in the national life. It was a school unique in its theory and without rivals in its practice. Its founder and head was Frederick W. Gunn, a native of Washington, Connecticut, where he spent his life, did his great and good work, and died in a ripe old age. He was a man of rare character and gifts. Large-hearted and large-minded, with a religious and ethical nature of the most positive kind, he was a man predestined to influence others, and mold the lives of youth. Though he was an "abolitionist" in days when that term carried with it intensest odium and social proscription, and a dissenter from conventional orthodoxy in a time when

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to differ from established standards was to write one's self down an "infidel," he was a successful teacher, and made and maintained a series of schools, which finally grew into the noble "Gunnery," a term at first used by the boys facetiously, but so apt and so happy as to be officially adopted as the title of the school. One of his old pupils, writing of the character of the institution, says :

"When Mr. Gunn called the school which his genius had established 'a home for boys' he stated the simple and exact truth. . . . Mr. and Mrs. Gunn both had the parental instinct so strong that they really took to their hearts each individual boy, and brooded over him as if he were their own flesh and blood."

This home-school and school-home in one was conducted as a miniature republic ; its aim was all-round, symmetrical character ; its method grew out of the hearty, wholesome, honest, and loving nature of its head ; its spirit was justice and love. Perhaps it was not a school where "marks" counted for a great deal ; and the drill in books may not have been as severe and systematic as in some institutions. But the boy who went to the "Gunnery" was pretty sure to imbibe some notions of honor, justice, kindliness, and obedience which he never forgot. As one of the old pupils writes :

"We recall an era of uncurbed freedom in a spot

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The Gunnery
Washington, Connecticut

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hallowed by home affections without home effeminacies; where every bad trait of a boy was systematically assailed and every good trait strengthened, so far as might be, so as to take its final place in an enduring character and robust manhood."

Gibson himself has given a tender and vivid picture of the school which played so large a part in his life, in the pages of "Pastoral Days":

"How lightly did I appreciate the fortunate journey when, twenty summers ago, I followed this road for the first time, when a boy of ten years, on my way to an unknown village, I looked across the landscape to the little spires on that distant hill! Little did I dream of the six years of unmixed happiness and precious experience that awaited me in that little Judea! I only knew that I was sadly quitting a happy home on my way to 'boarding-school'—a school called the Snuggery, taught by a Mr. Snug, in a little village named Snug Hamlet, about twenty miles from Hometown.

"There are some experiences in the life of every one which, however truthful, cannot be told but to elicit the doubtful nod or the warning finger of incredulity. They were such experiences as these, however, that made up the sum of my early life in that happy refuge called in modern parlance a 'boarding-school'—a name as empty, a word as weak and tame in its significance, as poverty itself; no doubt

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abundantly expressive in its ordinary application, but here it is a mockery and a satire. This is not a 'boarding-school'; it is a *household,* whose memories moisten the eye and stir the soul; to which its scattered members through the fleeting years look back as to a neglected home, with father and mother dear, whom they long once more to meet as in the tenderness of boyhood days; a cherished remembrance which, like the 'house upon a hill, cannot be hid,' but sends abroad its light unto many hearts who in those early days sought the loving shelter; a bright star in the horizon of the past, a glow that ne'er grows dim, but only kindles and brightens with the flood of years. Yes, yes; I know it sounds like a dash of sentiment, but words of mine are feeble and impotent indeed when sought for the expression of an attachment so fond, of a love so deep."

Most delightfully, too, does he blend an account, in the same chapter, of a return to the old school, in later years, and a picture of the characteristic life of that school as it lies in the memories of many successive generations of boys who passed through its scenes:

"It is eight o'clock, and the Snuggery is hushed in the quiet of the study hour, and as we look through the windows we see the little groups of studious lads bending over their books. Turning a corner on the piazza, we are confronted with a tall hexagonal struc-

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ture at its farther end. This is the Tower, the lower room of which is consecrated to the cozy retirement of Mr. and Mrs. Snug. The door leading to the porch is open, and, as if awakening from a nap in which the past fifteen years have been a dream, I listen to the same dear voice. I approach nearer. Under the glow of a student's lamp I look upon the beloved face, the flowing hair and beard now silvered with the lapse of years — a face of unusual firmness, but whose every line marks the expression of a tender, loving nature, and of a large and noble heart. Near him another sits — a helpmeet kind and true, cherished companion in a happy, useful life. Into her lap a nestling lad has climbed ; and as she strokes the curly head and looks into the chubby face, I see the same expression as of old, the same motherly tenderness and love beaming from the large gray eyes.

"Mr. Snug is leaning back in his easy-chair, and two boys are standing up before him ; one of them is speaking, evidently in answer to a question.

'I called him a galoot, sir.'

'You called George a galoot, and then he threw the base-ball club at you—is that it ?'

'Yes, sir,' interrupted George ; 'but I was only playing, sir.'

'Yes,' resumed the voice of Mr. Snug, 'but that club went with considerable force, and landed over the fence, and made havoc in Deacon Farish's onion-bed;

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and that reminds me that the deacon's onion-bed is overrun with weeds. Now, Willie,' continued Mr. Snug, after a moment's hesitation, with eyes closed, and head thrown back against the chair, 'Saturday morning—to-morrow, that is—directly after breakfast, you go out into the grove and call names to the big rock for half an hour. Don't stop to take breath; and don't call the same name twice. Your vocabulary will easily stand the drain. You understand?'

'Yes, sir.'

'And, George,' continued Mr. Snug, with deliberate, easy intonation, 'to-morrow morning, at the same time, you present yourself politely to Deacon Farish, tell him that I sent you, and ask him to escort you to his onion-bed. After which you will go carefully to work and pull out all the weeds. You understand, sir?'

'Yes, sir.'

'And then you will both report to me as usual.' And with a pleasant smile, which was reflected in both their faces, the erring youngsters were dismissed. Before the door has closed behind them we are standing in the doorway. Here I draw the curtain; for who but one of its own household could understand a welcome at the Snuggery?"

No feature of the "Gunnery" life is more interesting to the old scholar or to outsiders than the ingenious and effective punishments invented by Mr. Gunn

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for the less serious and still important offenses inevitable in such a community. He made early application of the principles so earnestly defended in Herbert Spencer's "Education" and contrived to "make the punishment fit the crime" in a manner worthy of W. S. Gilbert's famous "Mikado." His memorialist, enlarging on this phase of the "Gunnery" life, thus enumerates "the grotesque punishments which Mr. Gunn visited on petty offenses in his school and family":

"A boy of uncommon diffidence might be sent to call on some village spinster or, worse yet for the blushing youngster, on some comely village lass. A youth too boisterous would be dismissed for a four-mile walk, ordered to hold a chip in his mouth for an hour, or to run a dozen times around the church on the Green, sounding the tin dinner-horn at each corner in rotation. Two small boys caught fighting were often ordered to sit, one in the other's lap, taking turns thus for an hour or two. Pounding a log with a heavy club was a favorite panacea for superfluous energy in the family sitting-room. Once a mischievous youngster was seen sprinkling a dog's face with water at the tank behind the Gunnery. The master, who had a tender spot in his heart for animals, stole up behind the offender and ducked him liberally, to give him, as he said afterward, an inkling of the feelings of the dog. At the Gunnery it used to be a custom

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to allow a boy to take the anniversary of his birth as a holiday, and a too clever lad was detected by Mr. Gunn celebrating thus his third birthday within a single year. The next genuine anniversary of the boy's birth came on a Saturday, which the recusant celebrated by hugging a tree for several hours while his schoolmates enjoyed the regular school holiday. A resident of Washington tells how, years ago, he found at the fork of two roads and hugging a sign-post in anything but sentimental fashion a youth whose only reply to questions was, 'I'm a poor miserable sinner,' that being the formula of penance which the master had prescribed. A dozen lads some twenty years ago were caught raiding the bough-apple trees of the neighbors. Mr. Gunn made them draw up a formal address of apology, bear it in procession to each of the amazed owners of the trees, read it on their knees, and pray forgiveness. A single truant once caught committing the same offense in the orchard of a poor widow was sent to work all day picking up stones in one of her fields.

"Actual wickedness was severely punished by Mr. Gunn, sometimes in the good, old-fashioned way; but his motive in inflicting for minor faults the odd penalties here alluded to seemed to be to take cognizance of the error in a manner that would sufficiently incommode the culprit without hurting his self-respect or leaving an angry smart. The boy appreciated the

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fact that 'he stood corrected'; but he also appreciated the humorous side of the penalty. Those who revisited Washington after leaving school sought no familiar haunt with more interest than the shrines to which they had made penitential pilgrimages under orders—Kirby Corners, a gentle jog around the square; the old sawmill in the hollow, which, visited at night, was weird and ghostly enough to sober the wildest urchin; Moody Barn, as redolent of pleasant memories as of new-mown hay; and, for more serious faults, distant 'Judd's Bridge.'

. . . . . .

"He insisted on neatness and order, and often a family meeting was called and made a court of inquiry over a bit of paper found on the lawn, or a peanut-shuck on the stairs. Once there was a question as to the history of several pieces of orange-peel in the grass in front of the house. The forty boys were summoned and made to stand in a row on the long piazza. Mr. Gunn called upon each one to state what he knew about the orange-peel, and at the end of the investigation he formed the dozen or more culprits into file, the tallest at the head, and made them march in solemn procession about the yard until they had picked up all the offending scraps, and then to the pig-sty to deposit them in their proper place."

There is a delightful paragraph in a letter which Gibson wrote home to his brothers, in which he tells

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in a boy's quaint way of one of these ingenious penalties which was visited on himself.

"One day I and two other boys eat some walnuts in church in the meeting time. Mr. Gunn found it out. He made us three boys take the rest of our walnuts up to the minister. We did so and the minister gave us his thanks for the walnuts, and asked us if we would not have some supper, for it was supper time. We refused and left. He told us not to eat any more."

But Mr. Gunn could administer as sharp reprimands to parents and older folk as he could to the boys who were his pupils. There is a plaintive letter from Gibson to his father, growing yellow now, with age, in which the heart of the little boy is uncovered, and his longing for letters from home is touchingly revealed. And the fatherly, warm-hearted teacher had evidently read it, and his soul burned within him. So he wrote upon the back page of the little note the following admonitory words, which must have elicited a letter by return mail:

"My Dear Sir: It seems to me if I had such a dear little son as Willie Gibson, sent away from home to a boarding school, and thrown upon the cold charities of the world, so proverbially heartless and selfish as the ministers say it is, I would require one of the clerks to write to him once or twice a quarter. Willie is happy in his present relations, but somewhat anxious about the friends he left behind him. He presumes

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his parents are well, not having seen their names in the papers, but would feel more sure if he heard from them. Willie is a dear little fellow, just as good as he can be. Should you think it best to write to him, direct care of F. W. Gunn, Washington, Conn."!

These are words like rifle bullets!

Of course the students of child psychology will be interested to learn whatever is worth knowing concerning the appearance, in embryo, of the man Gibson in the boy of this period. There is satisfaction for such investigators and there is disappointment as well. There are many intimations, at this period, of the man that is to be. There are traces of peculiarities which wholly disappeared with the years. There were aptitudes and tastes appearing in the school-days at the Gunnery, which no reprimands and no discouragements could subdue; and there were short-comings and faults which the years were destined utterly to efface. It certainly seems strange to find Mr. Gunn writing to the boy's mother, "Willie has not yet learned to be spontaneously industrious. I know he will come to it. He improves"; and again to his father, "Willie insists that he is getting along finely in his studies, that he studies very hard, and is doing well. But you must accept this with some grains of allowance for a boy's favorable judgment of himself. He does not learn as fast as I wish to have him. I think his tendency to take on fat hinders his power of

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industrious, persevering application; he is getting to be quite a big fellow, and I urge him a good deal." When one remembers that the most marked of all his traits as a man was the fierce and enthusiastic zeal with which he worked, consuming the powers of a robust physique in his zest for toil, one is moved to be very patient with the unpromising side of a child's nature. It may take a great while to become "spontaneously industrious"; but Gibson's experience shows how needless it is to be despondent because a boy does not work with a man's spirit. Sufficient unto the age are the traits thereof.

But in other ways, the schoolboy was forecasting the traits of the mature man. There is a mournful letter preserved out of these years, in which the little fellow writes his father after receiving a reprimand for illustrating his letters with pen-and-ink pictures. His inborn faculty would exhibit itself, and the home letters were filled with funny and interesting sketches. But that did not seem to the parental mind a wise use of writing materials. So the embryo artist was warned to curb his passion for illustration. He wrote a few penitent lines in response. "Next comes about the writing. I own that I am very foolish in putting those pictures in my letters, and I won't do it any more. I never put them in only to the letters home." Vain promise! It was one more attempt to drive out nature with a pitchfork; and was as unsuccessful—as it

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deserved to be. The artist-impulse was straining and struggling within him already and was bound to assert itself more and more vigorously till it should triumph in his life-work.

So, too, there appeared in these early days the passionate love of nature which was to be a controlling element in his later years. Botany was one of the studies which he insisted upon taking up under Mr. Gunn's teaching. There was a little family controversy over the matter, growing out of the mother's fear that the really practical things would be neglected in this passion for nature-study. It sounds strange enough, at this distance in time, with all the light of the boy's later life, to read the mother's anxious words :

"We wish [Mr. Gunn] to judge and direct in all these things, but I was afraid your own wish and the way I spoke to you about the delight of studying Botany, might have led you to speak so positively in choosing it, that he would suppose it was by our direction. If you really do take up Botany you must expect to find that it is not all play either. There are hard things to remember, and you must make up your mind to work at them bravely and perseveringly if you are determined to make them yours."

A little sentence later in the same letter shows the bent of the boy. His mother, referring to a recent visit of his father to the school, remarks :

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"I was afraid when your father told me how he found you in the calamus swamp, that you would be sick."

That tells an interesting story of boyish passion for plants. And so do the little fellow's letters home. Very early in his life at the Gunnery he wrote to his father:

"I get along in my studies in Botany very well indeed, and he has described two or three plants, one of which was Marsh-marigold or the Cowslip. He has analyzed the cherry blossom"; and Mr. Gunn wrote a footnote to the same letter saying: "He seems delighted with Botany and makes close observations." This quality of his mind, cropping out in its earliest essays, appears again and again in these juvenile letters. They are well worth quoting, as early witnesses to the attentive eye, the retentive memory, the descriptive power which were part of his natural and congenital outfit for his life-work. One of them divides its pages between art and natural history:

"My paints have given me a great deal of fun. I bought a blank book and copied several pictures in it out of my 'Harris's Insects,' and I also painted them, some from the description and some from the plates. I have one page of beetles, another page of butterflies, etc., etc. I guess when I get it done it will be *'betterish nische.'* Everybody comes to me lately to have

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William Hamilton Gibson
Age, 13

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me draw and paint them a valentine, which of course I do for some of them. I wish that in your next letter you would send me a couple of paint brushes, for the hairs of mine keep coming out all the while.

"That same feeling has come over me that I used to have last summer when I was after bugs and butterflies. The other day, it came very strong and I went out to look for cocoons, and I looked and looked, but saw nothing, and gave it up entirely, but as I was coming on my way into the house I saw some small pear-trees and I thought that I would look on them and I did, and saw a bunch of leaves. I looked and saw there was a Cecropia cocoon done up in them which made me feel like an eagle darting at her prey. I grabbed the prize and kept it and have got it yet. We have got a new minister which I told you about. I showed it to him and he told me to call and see him and bring it to him and he then asked me if any boy had a microscope. I told him yes (for Commodore has got a Craig's Microscope) and the next evening Commodore and I took my 'Harris's Insects' and showed it to him. He was much pleased with it and is going to get one. We did not make a very long call, but it was a nice one."

Another letter to his mother enlists her help in his entomological interests :

"I have just found an Imperial moth worm on a maple-tree. Will you please look on one of the small

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apple-trees in the orchard near the place where the arbor used to be, and on that row of small apple-trees, there is a tree on which I put a Cecropia worm for myself, which may be found by its effects under the tree. I think a great deal of it or I would n't write about it. Have you found any worms yet? I wish that I was there to look about for them, or I wish that there was somebody there who would look after them for me, for it is such a splendid place for them. The boys are leaving from here, very fast, and we all will leave in 13 days more. . . .

"P. S. That worm that I told you about on the apple-tree, if very large, must be taken off and put into a box with fresh apple leaves every day; if small, do the same."

A letter which he wrote in 1865 bears witness to the trait which his teacher had already noted — his careful observation. He made pen-and-ink drawings to make clear what flower he was trying to identify, which was plainly the false foxglove.

"I have been out in several places and have stuck in as much as ten stakes in different places where those beautiful scarlet or crimson lilies grow and when the stalk has gone I will take them up. Saturday I intend to go out in search of some more. There are plenty of them, and sometimes I see them two or three on one stalk.

"Do you know what the large trumpet-creeper is

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that has very large flowers of a red color? One used to grow at the east end of the back piazza up against the side of the house. Well, there is a flower of the same shape and kind of a beautiful yellow color, but it grows like a primrose; on one stalk there are over 20 flowers of about an inch and a half in length. The tops of the buds seem to be lapped over each other, and when there are blossoms they look very pretty. I am going to try and get it for you, but I don't know whether it has seed or not. I suppose not. Nevertheless, I 'll try and get it for you, for it is very pretty.

"In a garden up here there is a kind of 'Columbine,' very large, of two kinds, purple and white and *very large.* I am welcome to all the seed that I want. I don't know whether you want any or not, but nevertheless I 'll get you a lot.

"Here I must stop. I remain

"Your aff. son WILLIE."

The boy was fortunate in his mother, whose fine nature, trained tastes, and Christian spirit moved and moulded the best there was in him. Her letters to the little pupil are models of maternal sympathy, and reflect very vividly the boy's strong passion for living things and the study of them. One of her characteristic messages went to him in 1862, and reveals her own interest in the pursuits which were delighting her children and which were destined to mean so much to the boy she was writing to:

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"How are your friends and dear companions, the worms? I missed them very much after you had gone, and often found myself stepping carefully and looking down to the right and the left in crossing the upper hall, expecting to see some green or brown thing crawling about. The great drawer I gave you, we call 'the worm drawer' yet, and I don't know as I shall ever open it comfortably again. The peaceable and innocent rolls of linen and sewing lie in it now, just as they used before you had it, but sometimes I forget and open the one under it cautiously, expecting to see some of your treasures dropped through again, on my things. Henry and Julie are making collections now also, and Cottie brought home, the other day, the finest, largest specimen I ever saw, of the sort you called 'Polyphemus'? It was of immense size, and a very bright healthy color, both in its body and in those little tufts that stud it all over. He laid it away very carefully, and left it in peace a few days, and yesterday, behold it had spun a cocoon in its box as large as a butternut, and as strong as linen, of a beautiful reddish brown. We shall expect the moth with great interest. The children are too impatient to hurry up business with their worms. They are forever opening the boxes, and lifting and handling the creatures, so that I should think the poor things would despair of ever getting a chance to set their houses in order, at all."

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His relations with his mother were always close and sympathetic. She was a rare nature, refined and cultivated, with a strong literary bent and deep religious feeling. She wrote not a little, contributing to the pages of "The Christian Union" and other publications. She scrupulously kept all the boy's letters from his schooldays forward through the years. One of the cherished mementos of her life was a little manuscript volume, which bears the inscription: "I leave this book to my son William." It is a record of her study of the Bible, her grapple with the great problems of ethical and theological thought, prayers in which she has uttered the aspirations of a reverent spirit insistently seeking light through all the confusion and shadow of modern speculation, comment upon the great books which were stirring Christendom and sounding the note of the new thought about Christ and Christianity. To read them is to discover the sources of the son's deep reverence and broad, unconventional religious life. It is to feel anew the unconscious power of motherhood in shaping the ductile spirit of childhood, and to be certain that the light of such a spirit was a very pillar of fire to the soul of her son.

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CHAPTER II

CALLING AND ELECTION

IT was between the years 1866 and 1868 that the great crisis of young Gibson's life occurred; and a series of influences and incidents befell, which were decisive in settling the great questions of his life-work and of the spirit in which he would undertake it.

The latter of the two was the first to be decided. It was at this period of his life that the boy experienced one of those changes in disposition, which was like the awakening or the sudden unfolding of the real self, hitherto hidden under apparently opposite traits. While he was at the Gunnery, Gibson had troubled the soul of his teacher. as we have seen, because he had not, as Mr. Gunn put it, "learned to be spontaneously industrious." But during the years immediately following, while he was yet at the Polytechnic, he "came to himself." He had been an easy-going boy, rather indolent in habit, or at least deficient in the power of industrious, persevering application. But now he began to show a love of work, to love it for its own sake, to plan it, and to seek it of his own volition. He took a vigorous hold upon his studies at the Polytechnic. He found a new delight, as well

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as a sustained, deep-seated interest in his drawing. He took up a new pursuit, to which he devoted his spare hours to such good purpose that he mastered it in astonishingly little time, and carried it to a high point of skill. Chancing to see some wax-flowers made by an expert of his time in Brooklyn, he promptly decided that the art was one which he could master. After some essays of his own, he put himself under the instruction of this teacher, who soon told the boy that he could teach him no more. There are some wonderful stories floating down from those days concerning the work he did in this medium, so fine in its imitative perfection as to deceive the very elect. One, in particular, is to the effect that a cluster of blossoms which he had modeled and carried, as a gift, to Mr. Beecher's home, stood upon a table in a little vase when Mrs. Beecher saw it for the first time. She took up the vase, and, raising it to inhale the fragrance which it promised, had crushed the delicate work before she discovered the illusion. Apocryphal or not, the story shows the impression his work made upon his early admirers.

But the time had come which was to put his earnestness and force to the test. His father's death in 1868 had made it necessary that he should hasten to choose a career and begin his self-support. Few young men are "called" to any special work in life; fewer still "elect," of their own free will, the thing

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they will do because it is the thing they must do, beyond a doubt. And Gibson began by showing himself no different from other youth; he was to discover his distinction later. For no particular reason, save that it was suggested to him by a business friend and adviser of whom he sought counsel, he took up life-insurance, and became an agent for a leading company of his time. It gives one a strange feeling of incongruity to read the little business card, bearing the title of the "Home Life Insurance Company," announcing "Wm. H. Gibson, General Agent, 103 Fulton Street, Brooklyn," with "Office hours, 9 to 10." One thinks of Nathaniel Hawthorne in the custom-house at Salem; of Charles Lamb at his clerk's desk in East India House; and experiences a deep sense of relief that this new genius had the grace and the strength to escape from an uncongenial pursuit and follow the urgings of his own spirit. The business had no attractions for the boy. He wanted to draw. He was yearning after open fields and wide horizons. There was a craving in his nature which was at once an outcry for a life of self-utterance by the means and methods of art, and a protest against a life spent in what is called, with cool disparagement of other pursuits, "business." The young man felt that the one career would mean self-expression, with all its joy, its power, its peace; while the other would be a self-repression, continual, galling, paralyzing.

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He was born to be a student of nature and to tell her story to the men and women who had not his endowment. The hour had come in which he was to decide whether he could heed his call, believe in himself, choose the path which invited him to labors that fitted his nature, and dare all its difficulties for the sake of being true to his own soul. The situation was not new. It is no unusual thing for young men to waver between such rival purposes. But the interest of such a crisis never wanes. It is always a trial of the real stuff and fiber of the individual. It is an experience which the youth must bear alone. But the gain belongs to all men when the decision is made which seals a life to devotion to its own highest ideal.

There is nothing to record the inward struggle of those days, save the quick resolve which he made, and the abrupt turn in his purpose. In the course of his calls to solicit business he chanced upon an acquaintance who was a draughtsman, and found him engaged in drawing upon the block. Gibson watched him a while, and forgot his errand in the sight of this congenial work. As he told a friend, years afterward: "After looking on for a few moments, I decided that I could do such work as well as he. I learned where the blocks could be bought and went off immediately to invest in a quantity of the material. From that moment I abandoned everything else, and set to work at drawing." This was in truth

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the Rubicon of his life. In the decision it marks, young Gibson yielded to his own most honorable ambitions. He elected what was probably the harder way, if we count discouragements of one sort and another, the dampening predictions of the critical and experienced, the warnings and dissuasions of his best friends. Even in a financial way, it meant straitened circumstances, hard work for small pay, and years of the most strenuous effort, before he could obtain the recognition which meant a market for his wares. By so much the more must we esteem his courage, his faith in himself, his willingness to pay the high price of toil and patient waiting for the success which came at last.

One hardly does justice to the boldness of the young man's resolve until he remembers that Gibson was proposing to begin his career as an artist with nothing but his native genius as a warrant of success. He was wholly lacking in training, as later days would understand it. He had studied art in no school. He had received the teaching of no master-artist. All that he could do was what he had worked out for himself. It would seem almost audacious, even reckless, for a young man to rush into the field of illustration with no more preparation either to fit him to do intelligent work or to discover to himself whether he really possessed abilities which would make his venture worth while. Untaught and unpractised, save in the desul-

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William Hamilton Gibson
Age, 17

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tory way of a boy's attempts to express his own ideas with the pencil, he made up his mind that he could and that he would do as good artistic work as anybody. The intrepidity of youth is either ridiculous or it is sublime. Perhaps we must let events decide which it is. In this case the years made Gibson's daring spirit seem the truest courage. Yet one holds his breath as he thinks of this boy boldly walking into the offices of the Harper Brothers, with his drawings on wood, to offer them for sale.

It is small wonder that they did not find acceptance in this exacting quarter. Gibson, armed with a letter of introduction to the Harpers, had gone to one of the firm, who turned him over to Charles Parsons, the head of the art department. It was arranged that he should have two weeks' trial, to test his capacity. At the end of that time Mr. Parsons said to him, in substance, "I do not see that you will ever succeed in an artistic career. I advise you to drop it at once, and go into some other pursuit. I do not feel justified in recommending you to go on." This judgment was as kindly in intention as it was candid in tone. It was the verdict of a cool-headed critic as well as an honest friend. It ought to have put an end to Gibson's aspirations. It is the joy of all his friends to remember how he met this rebuff. He insisted that he should go on; he knew what he could do, and he meant to show other people. Nothing could deter,

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nothing could discourage him. "Very well," said Mr. Parsons, "whatever you do, do your best; and show me your work from time to time."

So Gibson turned from the doors which afterward opened to him so eagerly, and traveled on in search of appreciation and a market. He found both at the hands of John G. Shea, then of Frank Leslie's house, who bought his drawings for "The Chimney Corner" and "The Boys' and Girls' Weekly." "I began to pay my way," said Gibson in a newspaper interview, "as soon as I met him. It was he who first suggested to me that I might furnish text with my drawings; and then I received double pay." Soon after this he began to furnish botanical drawings for "The American Agriculturist." His work was so acceptable that he was invited to take a desk in the offices of the publication, and he here became acquainted with J. C. Beard, Jr., with whom he had a life-long friendship. An opportunity occurring to furnish drawings for botanical articles in Appleton's "Encyclopædia," Gibson undertook the task; and when this led to a disagreement with the manager of the "Agriculturist," he and Beard left the paper and took a room by themselves, in John Street. Here the orders began to come in, besides what they were doing for Leslie and Appleton, from various lithographers. The young men led a happy life, full of hard work, good fellowship, ambitious plans. Gibson was absorbed in his

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pursuits. He shrank from nothing because it was hard or because it was humble. He turned his pencil to whatever would afford him training and whatever would bring him honest returns. He was ready to do all sorts of "odds and ends" of illustration. He had great facility in producing puzzles of every description, especially those depending on illustration. One entire notebook is filled with suggestions for riddles, puzzles, rebuses, anagrams, which he worked out or had in reserve.

The days were full of hope and determination. He had no doubts about his ultimate success. He was a firm believer in himself. And he knew he had found the work he loved and into which he could throw his whole abounding life. It is a fine picture of a brave young fellow facing a difficult career with the buoyant hopes of youth and the confidence of a really strong nature. He was only nineteen when he wrote to the young girl to whom he had already given his heart: "This work perfectly fascinates me. It has always been my choice; it always will be. I shall never be happy if I have to abandon it. I look forward to it with delight and enthusiasm. . . . I do not allow myself to be too sanguine. I expect difficulties, trials, disappointments. I am willing to work, use all my energy, brave all manner of disappointments if in the end that future which we so often picture to one another can be realized."

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Another letter, a few months later, tells the story of hard work and increasing care, in apology for delay in writing to his mother. It also introduces the matter of one of his largest commissions up to this time, and shows how certainly he was making his way:

"Mother, I think of you just as much as ever, but I am so busy that when evening comes my natural dislike to letter writing is increased tenfold by fatigue. I wish I could give some correct idea of the amount of work that I do, and of how continually I am occupied. I am dreadfully busy, and last week and week before I worked at the office evening after evening until nearly eight, very seldom leaving before seven. You may perhaps form some idea when I tell you that I have got work on hand now (all in a hurry, as fast as I can do it) amounting to over $1,000.00 (one thousand dollars). It is all from Appleton & Co. and $840.00 of it is in one commission. It consists of twelve drawings on stone, each stone measuring nearly four feet by three, and weighing about four hundred pounds. I agreed to do the drawings on each stone for $70.00 which amounts as above. I have commenced and finished one stone satisfactorily, and commenced another to-day. It takes five men to bring the stone to my office and it is the largest size that can be used on a power press. A 'tremendous job' people call it, and don't see 'how on earth I manage to get at all these things.' I believe I told you

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something about it. You remember that I heard of the intention of the Appletons to publish some mammoth botanical charts, and as it was rather in my line I went and saw Mr. Appleton about it. He asked me if I could draw on stone. I told him 'yes,' as if I had done it all my life, and gave him my estimate. It was an estimate calculated to pay me well, and I felt sure by previous inquiry that it was as low as he could get it done elsewhere. It resulted as I expected and the entire job was turned over to me."

The sequel to that story is given in one of his frank, confidential letters to his mother, meant only for her eye, and therefore full of such a self-expression as he would have made to no one else. It answers still further the question as to how he came to get this particular commission in a way which reveals again his boldness and faith in undertaking new and untried work:

"N. Y., *Jan. 22, 1872.*

"My dear Mother:

"I have stopped short in my work for the purpose of writing a few lines to you, as more time has already elapsed since you last heard from me than I had expected to allow. Everything goes on as smoothly as I could desire; of course there are ripples occasionally but they only tend to make the intervening success and prosperity more serene by contrast.

"I still continue as busy as ever only more so.

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The stone work is the principal employment, at present, and I have given from the start immense satisfaction. You remember that in my last 'long letter' I spoke of commencing on the second stone the following day. Well I did so and finished on the next day after, not spending quite two days on it. That week I realized $170.00 for work which I did all myself. The Appletons were surprised more than I can tell you when I informed them of the completion of the second stone, and would scarcely believe that I had done it myself. When they came to see the proof they were even more pleased than they were with the first. The third stone was then sent to my office on the next *Saturday afternoon*. Monday morning following it had not a mark on it and before I left for home that very evening it was completely finished, thus making $70 in one day. On the next morning I went up to the Appletons' and notified Mr. A. that his third stone for the charts was finished and in a playful way that I wished he would please send for it and let me have the next. 'Why,' said he, 'I told them to take it to you last Saturday afternoon.' 'Well,' said I, 'they *did* bring me one last Saturday afternoon and that is the one that I have finished and wish you to take away.' I wish you could have seen the expression of mingled surprise and incredulity which covered his face. 'Why,' said he, 'have you done it yourself?' 'Yes,' I returned, 'I commenced it and fin-

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ished it yesterday.' He received the intelligence rather with hesitation at first and finally as I had expected, took the course of questioning whether there was really $70.00 worth of work on them. He was very coy in his manner of doing it but I saw well enough through it all. He put such questions as these, 'Well, you are doing them much quicker than you expected are n't you? There is not quite so much work on them as you expected, is there? You thought at first that there would be a week's time on each stone you remember?' You see the style of query he used. To all these I admitted that they had become much more easy for me than I had expected, that I was hurrying them up because I knew that they were in a great hurry for the work. I reminded them that my estimate was the lowest that they could obtain in the city and said if I had the faculty of working fast that I ought to be remunerated for it, etc. 'But,' said he, 'there is quite a wide difference between a week and a day and it seems that you did the last one in a day.' 'Well,' said I, 'so I did, but I will spend a week at them hereafter.' This made him laugh heartily, and he drew me a check for $70.00 on the spot and told me that he was glad I was doing them so fast and that the firm were more than pleased, thinking my work far ahead of the original, etc. The fourth stone I finished this Monday having commenced it on Saturday last. It has been taken away

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this morning; the fifth one is now on my desk ready for me to proceed. It is a beautiful surface to draw upon, and I enjoy the work very much. I certainly have the faculty of drawing very fast. Several artists have seen my drawings on the stone and several lithographers also, and they all tell me frankly (after they have been really convinced that I have drawn one in a day or even two days) that there is not another man in the city that could do it and no one that could do it better. The most reasonable time which the Appletons could find elsewhere was a week and this amongst lithographers who had drawn upon stone all their lives. The printers of my lithographic work say that they never printed neater work in their lives and that my drawings all print very brightly."

It was about these days that he made his first original work, a little composition now treasured and carefully preserved. He wrote about it to his mother:

"Week before last I took to Mr. Bunce a little bit of sunset effect in the form of a sketch which I did in fifteen minutes, in India ink and white. Beard admired it ever so much, and just for fun I took it to Bunce as a sort of specimen of 'original design.' To my surprise he admired it so much that he gave me a block, and told me to put it on the wood by all means, for the 'Journal.' It is very simple in composition, being drawn in a circle with the foreground

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The Road to Hide-and-Seek Town
First Composition, 1873

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open. On the right is a hillside with a few tall trees; on the left another slope, more distant. The extreme distance is composed of a village with church-spire, trees, etc., standing out against a brilliant sunset sky which shows through the trees. In the extreme foreground is a traveler, or farmer, wending his way homeward; his figure is almost a silhouette and his shadow is cast upon the road. It is my first attempt at a design. My head is 'chuck full of them,' but I cannot get a chance to use them I am so busy."

Other letters covering this period are full of interest. They show the heart of the young fellow, his frank delight in his own success, and in the approval which his work begins to receive. He was much elated over the success of an engraving he made for the "Aldine":

"NEW YORK, *Feb. 2, 1872.*

"DEAR MOTHER:

"I have just a few moments' spare time which I will improve by writing a short letter or note to you.

"Concerning my picture, all the artists of the establishment admired the effect and recognized the 'excellent copy' of Inness' style and handling. They all seem to think that the picture is rather unnatural in its intensity but that the effect is wonderful. Well, it was yesterday that I brought it over. I had cut it out of the paper on which I drew it and pasted it neatly on a large piece of white stiff photograph board. Its

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appearance was thus greatly improved, as it had a margin of nearly six inches all around it. At noon time I took the sketch down to the 'Aldine.' I saw Mr. Sutton, the proprietor. He held the sketch off from him, looked at it through his hand, and pronounced it magnificent. I of course told him that it was a copy. He asked me if he had not met me before. I told him 'yes'; that one year ago I came to him with my first drawings on wood, and that he did a great deal to encourage me at the time. He remembered me, remembered my little drawings and described both of them to me—told me that I had a *tremendous* eye for color, and he had noticed it when I first went to him. He said, 'When you were here a year ago I told you to come to me when you began to do original work, did I not?' I answered yes and told him a little of my experience since that time. Well we had a nice little talk and it ended in his giving me a large full page block with the order to put it on wood and he said that I must bring him some more sketches. I am to correct Inness' unfinished style and make a more finished picture than the original is, as a painting. When it is done I will probably receive from 50 to 60 dollars for it.

"I begin it next week and as I cannot give Roberts' time to it and will have to work evenings, will probably not finish it for two weeks or so."

In the fall of this year he had a commission from

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the Appletons to visit Rhode Island on a sketching tour. It was his first attempt at anything of just this sort, and he was evidently nervous over his responsibilities. But his unfailing courage served him once more, and his naïve account of the trip and of the reception of its fruits is preserved in a letter to his mother:

"BROOKLYN, N. Y., *Sept. 23/72.*

"MY DEAR MOTHER:

"I returned from my trip on Thursday, but did not wish to write you immediately as I hoped to be able to send you more encouraging news by waiting a day or so. Many were the disadvantages which I labored under during all the time while I was away, being almost sick constantly. Nevertheless I worked through it all, hard and faithfully, and the result is 'a perfect success,' far exceeding my greatest anticipations. It was a very important period in my business career, and I felt the necessity of working *hard,* and, truth to say, I was confident of success, but not to any such degree as that with which I have met.

"My commission included Providence and Suburbs: Pawtucket; Providence Bay; Narragansett Bay; Rocky Point and Narragansett Pier, all of which I visited and sketched. During the first week I remained at the Central Hotel, Providence, where I had quite a pleasant room. It being the first time of my being

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sent upon work of this kind I was ignorant as to what would be expected of me and of course was much worried and anxious, and the one thing which troubled me most has been the one of all others which has made me so successful. Each day, (with my camp seat, umbrella and materials,) I would start out either on foot or in the cars, traveling nearly until evening and in no case did I bring home with me more than three sketches, and this number only once. It was this scarcity in my number of sketches that caused me to worry, but I still felt that what I had got were good; all through the day would I pass by little bits of landscape that I thought would compose rather prettily, but nevertheless I made up my mind (as I was not to be gone long) to sketch only such bits as I knew would be particularly attractive, and of course it would take nearly the whole day before I could find and sketch more than two. I imagined that this was a very small number, but did not see how I could do much better, as it took a great deal of time to walk about and select the prettiest views. Well, I worked on in this way for the whole week, and at the end of it I never realized more happily the fact that 'seven times two made fourteen' and I thought that if I could go home with twenty-eight sketches it would be certainly well enough as far as the number was concerned. But, again I was very much in doubt as to the merit of my sketches and as

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the other cause of anxiety was now partially removed, this took its place and troubled me. The next circumstance took the spirits right out of me and made me about sick. It commenced to rain and kept it up constantly until I left, and it was the meanest, wetest, rain that I ever knew of, and when it did n't actually rain it 'fogged' and drizzled which was nastier yet. The blank sheet of my drawing paper would have been the best sketch of landscape during those days, as I could see scarcely more than this would represent. Even in the rain I went out and made a few sketches of places already decided upon and finally left Providence in disgust, on my way home down Narragansett Bay. I stopped over night at Rocky Point where I made two sketches, leaving for Newport on the following day (Tuesday). On Wednesday I went to Narragansett Pier when I also made two or three sketches, thence homeward.

"I came home with about twenty-two sketches. All here at the house thought them beautiful. Mr. Beard was perfectly surprised at their beauty and Mr. Bunce at Appleton's pronounced them one of the 'best lots of sketches he has yet had' and complimented me on my 'perfect success.' He was very much pleased indeed, and admired them all, and gave vent to his admiration with loud praise; he called old and young Appleton and several other gentlemen to see them, all of whom pronounced them 'very fine.'

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I expected then that he would look them over and select about five of the prettiest for me to put on the wood. This was the most that I thought he would select. Mr. Beard, when I asked him, said that he thought they would select about five, as in other cases they had only taken about that number out of an equivalent stock of sketches. Judge of my complete surprise to see him select and count fifteen of them saying that he would have them all drawn for the 'Picturesque America.' This left only about six of the lot which he did not want, and he complimented me on the choice of my selections, saying 'Generally a lot of sketches will come in, and I will look them over and reject two thirds of them, on account of the subjects not being interesting, the artists sketching whatever they come across that looks "pretty" and not hunting for the most interesting alone.' This is the amount of what he said to me and finished it up by telling me that all of mine were of interest and composed well, which was the very thing I studied for and which most troubled me on account of the time it took and the consequent small number of my sketches. Mr. Bunce was perfectly delighted, and if I please him as well in my drawings on the wood, he will probably wish to send me off again, when I will in all probability receive '$40.00 per week and expenses.' He gave me four large blocks nearly 'full page' to start on and the rest

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William Hamilton Gibson
Age, 23

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will come along as fast as I want them; and will amount to about $400 worth of work. Besides this I have plenty of work from Filmer, in a hurry, another very large job from Appleton (on stone), stacks of work for Leslie and plenty else besides, scarcely knowing where to begin. My bill to D. App. & Co. for my trip was considerably over $100, which they paid without a word not even wishing an item.

"It does seem rather strange to me that whatever I undertake to do, always ends in success, and in *unexpected success.* To be sure it is done by hard work and I do not see why any one cannot succeed who will put their shoulder to the wheel, be ambitious and full of resolution to surmount all difficulties. So far I have not made a failure, and one reason has been that I have not attempted a thing to which I did not feel equal. I am thankful that I do succeed, and I recognize, through all my experience in business, and in my efforts to advance, the ever present help and guidance of a good and kind Providence."

On the 29th of October, 1873, he was married to Miss Emma L. Blanchard of Brooklyn. The occasion was made the more interesting by the marriage of his sister Juliet, and the double service was performed by Mr. Beecher. In the following spring he made a sketching trip to Washington, D. C., making pictures for "Picturesque America." He was now doing good work and receiving constant employment. He

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says of the Washington sketches, especially having in mind a "combination" which included many of the public buildings:

"BROOKLYN, *Apr. 19, 1874.*

"MY DEAR MOTHER:

"I am only going to write you a few lines to-night (which by the way has generally been my expressed intention every time I have written) and for fear that I may possibly overstep that intention I have selected a larger sheet of paper than usual, and expect at least to confine the limits of my letter therein.

"Mr. Bunce was very much pleased with my rendering of a difficult subject, and one which had worried him considerably. I took him the drawing yesterday, and received another commission from him, more work for the 'Picturesque America.' My drawings will already appear under three heads, viz.: 'Providence and Suburbs,' 'Connecticut Shore,' and 'Washington and Mt. Vernon,' and now there is still another to be added. I am to proceed immediately with Brooklyn and Prospect Park, and expect to begin my sketching to-morrow, of course being paid as I am usually, for my time. The series will not be very extensive, probably a combination or two with a few small separate pictures. I hope that this new work will not interfere with my intended visit with you during arbutus season. I will try and manage so as to bring my work up there for I hope to spend three

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or four days with you. *Be sure and let us know* when the arbutus is in bloom."

In the fall of 1876 Gibson published through James Miller a book for boys, of which a fuller word will be said later in these pages. It bore the title, alluring to any boy, "The Complete American Trapper; or the Tricks of Trapping and Trap-Making." It was republished by two other firms, and still has a market.

These were the years of apprenticeship and study. The young man's art class was his own studio. His course of study was determined by the business needs of those who employed him. His chief instructor was himself. The years went quickly by. A trip to the Adirondacks in 1875, another to Philadelphia to sketch the Centennial Exhibition of 1876 were the chief incidents of the next two years. The Philadelphia enterprise was under the patronage of Harper Brothers. For at last he had secured the approval he had coveted so much, and was able to win his way into the publications of this house on his own merits. From time to time he had shown his work to Mr. Parsons, who admitted his progress and acknowledged his growing promise. At last he received an order to illustrate an article in conjunction with his friend Beard. Other work followed, and he was a recognized contributor to the Harpers' publications.

But the work which probably made his "calling and election sure" was his masterly illustration of an

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article written by Mrs. Helen S. Conant, entitled "Birds and Plumage." Gibson had suggested the article, furnishing the idea and proposing as a title "The Plumage of Fashion." He did not secure the commission to write the text: his abilities as a writer had not been demonstrated, and he himself was diffident about them. But he received the order for sixteen illustrations, into which we may well believe he threw his whole strength. The initial design attracted marked attention and drew out unstinted praise. It was a full-page picture of a peacock's feather. It gave the article instant success. The press was enthusiastic in commending it. The August number of "Harper's Magazine" for 1878 may be said to have marked a new epoch in American illustration; and young Gibson's work led all the rest. The reserved and refrigerated criticism of the "Nation" was relaxed almost to the point of enthusiasm: "The remarkable series of birds drawn on the block by Mr. William H. Gibson is more obviously than the imitations just mentioned the result of the engraver's skill and unwearied patience. The cut of the peacock feather, for instance, which introduces the paper on 'Birds and Plumage,' must impress even the uninitiated with its rare and costly character, whether regarded as a design or as an engraving. Mr. Gibson has evidently studied his subjects with great care and succeeded in portraying them, both in action and in

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repose, in a graceful and life-like manner, with instructive accessories." The "Christian Union," always careful and conservative, said: "Upon this article, which has been a long time in preparation, the publishers have, it is understood, laid out an unprecedentedly large sum of money. Certainly Mr. Gibson's graceful pencil has given them the worth of it. No better work, it is safe to say, has ever appeared in the pages of the magazine."

But best and most conclusive of all the words of praise which this drawing elicited, were those of Mr. Charles Eliot Norton, in a personal letter to the young artist:

"CAMBRIDGE, *Nov. 8, 1878.*

"DEAR SIR: I am much obliged to you for your note, for it gives me an opportunity which I have desired, to express to you my admiration of the skill and beauty of the design of the peacock's feather, so excellently cut on wood by Mr. King. It is not merely subtle and refined execution which is shown in the piece, but a poetic feeling for the quality and charm of the feather itself and for its value in composition. Your feather ought to be as well known as Rembrandt's shell or Hollar's furs. For you and Mr. King in your joint work have succeeded in suggesting the splendor, the play, the concentration of color, the bewildering multiplicity of interlacing curves, the elastic spring and vitality of every fiber, and have

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given the immortality of art to one of the purely decorative productions of nature. I shall look for your new work with great interest.

"I am very desirous to see a proof of your feathers on soft India paper. If I can find some proper paper here I shall be tempted to send it to you. But paper suitable for such work is not easily found."

All this was said of the youth who six years before had been pronounced without even the promise of ability! Surely he had a right to be proud of his triumph. He had fairly won his spurs. Henceforth there was no doubt of his standing as one of the first of American illustrators.

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"The Peacock's Feather" (*"The Peerless Plume"*)

(*"Highways and Byways"*)

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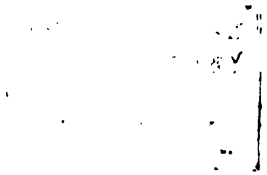

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CHAPTER III

A QUICK SUCCESS

FROM this time forward, Gibson's success as an artist was assured. And not very long after, he was induced to try his hand at authorship, with results quite as convincing. During the summer of 1878 he spent his vacation, in company with his wife, in the old homes at Newtown and at Washington, Connecticut. Returning to the city in the autumn, and recounting his delightful experiences to Mr. Alden, the editor of "Harper's Magazine," the latter insisted that Gibson should put them into an article which he should also illustrate. But even with the practice which he had given himself, in the brief articles he had furnished with many of his drawings, he distrusted his own capacity for literary work. He had no such innate sense of power to write as made him so confident with his pencil. He demurred at the proposition; but Mr. Alden was firm and persistent. "Write it just as you have told it to me," was his encouraging word. His suggestion was followed, and in the August number of the monthly appeared an affectionate sketch of the old boyhood homes, under the title, which was but a thin disguise, "Hometown

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and Snug Hamlet." It proved an instant success. The note struck was genuine and pleasing. The illustrations won the public eye. The canny editor suggested a similar article which should cover the winter phases of country life in the same vein. It was prepared, and appeared in the number for March, 1880; and had a reception as enthusiastic as his former venture. The idea of completing the cycle of the seasons was inevitable, and in June there followed the article on "Spring-Time," which was pronounced "the most attractive paper" of this number of the magazine, whose "rhythmic prose" was not less highly commended than its illustrations, which another critic called "almost as good as spring itself." In November the series was rounded out with "An Autumn Pastoral," which led a reviewer to say "Mr. Gibson is a great artist, and has a great future before him."

In 1879 he furnished illustrations for E. P. Roe's "Success with Small Fruits," which appeared serially in "Scribner's Magazine," and which opened the way to an intimate friendship with the author. He made the designs for the poems of the Goodale sisters, "In Berkshire with the Wild-flowers." But these were mere incidents in the work he was turning off, for half the firms in New York City, and on all sorts of subjects having to do with nature, with animal life, with flowers, and with fruits. In the spring he made a visit to "Roeland" to sketch, and he divided his

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August vacation between Connecticut and the White Mountains, where he gathered material for a year's hard work. He busied himself, too, with work in water color, steadily keeping his ideals in mind, and his own art-training in hand.

In the fall of 1880, the four papers which had appeared in "Harper's Magazine" were collected and published in a sumptuous volume, entitled "Pastoral Days." It was a book which yesterday would have been called "epoch-making"; to-day it would only be called "record-breaking." The simple truth about it is that it really touched the high-water mark in the history of nature-illustration by means of wood-engraving. It was everywhere hailed as exhibiting the very best work of its kind ever achieved. The praise which fell to Gibson himself was twofold; for it was an enthusiastic recognition of his talent both as author and as artist. His engravers were applauded for the skill and spirit with which they interpreted his designs. His publishers were commended for the unstinted generosity which had balked at no pains or cost. Even the printer received a curtain-call. For the "Evening Post" with great discrimination insisted that much of the success of the work was due to "another artist, whose name is nowhere given. That artist's name is David Lewis and he passes his days in the press-room of Harper Brothers, amid the clatter of the printing-machines, engaged in the grimy

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work of his office." The "Evening Mail" expressed the unanimous verdict of art circles when it declared: "Writers on art spoke of the days of Bewick with a sort of despair, as though no one like him might ever be expected again. It has been reserved for the United States to show that wood has, for the purposes of engraving, capacities of which Bewick never dreamed, and to produce a school of artists who in treating landscape, at least upon wood, have surpassed everything on the other side of the ocean. In the first rank of these artists stands Mr. William Hamilton Gibson." The London "Times" in a long notice spoke of his having "the rare gift of feeling for the exquisitely graceful forms of plant life and the fine touch of an expert draughtsman which enable him to select and to draw with a refinement which few artists in this direction have ever shown." Even the "Saturday Review" in a notice a column and a half in length, confessing its ignorance of Mr. Gibson and his work, declared that his drawings were so full of delicate fancy and feeling, and his writing so skilful and graceful, that it hoped "to hear more of him soon, in either function or both." In hardly more than two years from the time of his first illustrations Gibson had made his way to the very front rank of the world's illustrators. His position was truly of his own achieving; and he never fell back from the eminence he had so fairly won. His friend Mr. Charles N. Hurd of the Boston "Tran-

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script" does the situation no more than simple justice in a letter written upon reading the "Saturday Review" article:

"TRANSCRIPT OFFICE,
"324 WASHINGTON STREET, COR. MILK STREET,
"BOSTON, *May 18, 1881.*

"MY DEAR GIBSON:

"I congratulate you from the very bottom of my heart on the magnificent article on 'Pastoral Days' in the Saturday Review, which, you will see by the papers I send, I have copied into the Transcript. Nothing could have been more gracefully done, and then, in the Saturday Review, one of the very hardest to please of all the British journals! Why, my dear fellow, they never said half so much before of any literary American, living or dead. And there is n't an 'if' in the whole article! I feel as rejoiced about it as if I had some personal share in the glory. If you have n't a right now to carry your chin high on Broadway then nobody in New York has. I tell you, it's a great thing to be appreciated; to get praise where you feel that it rests wholly and altogether upon the merits of your work, and has in it no spark of flattery. I can imagine how long the way home seemed that night, and how happy you two were in reading over what the two-thousand-mile-away critic had written. It is worth a good many years' hard pulling to have one such day."

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One great and decisive reason why he moved on so steadily was his constant ambition to improve upon what he had done. One might easily be misled by the tone of his confidential letters to his mother and others into thinking him overconfident in himself, and a little puffed up by his quick and overwhelming success. But the thought would be absolutely unfair. He was not vain; he was never self-satisfied; he never rested in what he had achieved. After the rousing reception of "Pastoral Days," he could write to Colonel Gibson in quiet Fryeburg: "I have just finished the last of my White Mountain illustrations—four months' work—and am beginning a new series of original articles which shall 'knock spots' out of all past work. You ask in a previous letter, 'Can you beat "Pastoral Days"'? Good gracious! The book is so full of shortcomings to me that I wonder at the astonishing appreciation of it. There are a few illustrations in it that I hardly expect to improve very much upon; but as to the average excellence I can 'see it' and 'go a hundred better.' Perhaps the result will not be as popular. Can't tell. But I can do better work." That was the key-note of his life. To do something better next time was the rule of his endeavor. To do something different each time, to turn some new page, follow some new trail, record some new traits of his favorite world, was another characteristic of

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his purposes. And it kept him from becoming repetitious and tiresome, as he repeatedly piqued curiosity with his novel enterprises in nature-study.

In the late summer of 1880 he spent six weeks in sketching among the White Mountains, whence he went to Williamstown, Massachusetts, for another six weeks of rest. He came home laden with sketches and with photographs, which were at once utilized in making the illustrations for Drake's "Heart of the White Mountains." He worked at these with diligence, as we have seen, never a day, apparently, passing without its picture; but it was far into the following spring before the series was finished. The volume was issued in 1881, but before its appearance he was well along with the text and the illustrations for the new articles in the magazine, in the same vein as "Pastoral Days." In expanded form they were published in the fall of 1882 under the title "Highways and Byways." It would have seemed improbable that the reception given to his first volume could be repeated. Novelty does so much with Americans to arouse enthusiasm, and they are so quick to compare the later with the former effort, that it might have been predicted that a second volume striking the same note as Gibson's first success would not be so warmly praised. But the public liked the note, and it pronounced the new book better than the old. The press notices of '82 and '83

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are in the same strain of unaffected admiration and delight as those of two years before. Perhaps he had most reason to be proud of the approval the new book won from the staid London "Academy" and from Mr. Philip Gilbert Hamerton's "Portfolio." The former, though a little late in discovering him was ingenious in its sweeping approval. "Fancy to yourself" said the "Academy," "a Thoreau who has read both Darwin and Ruskin, and who has learned to use the pencil of Birket Foster. To this add the finest workmanship of the American school of wood-engraving, and all the luxury of the richest paper and the clearest type, and you may form some idea of the handsome book now before us. At first it attracted only by the rare delicacy of its drawings, which reproduce with unrivaled truth the exquisite tracery of vegetation, and the 'ebon and ivory' of Nature's shadows. But when we discovered that the artist is also the author, we began to read; and we found ourselves unable to stop till we got to the end." "We feel that we have here far more than in most American books, a genuine product of the soil." Mr. Hamerton credits the new book with "a love of nature that is Wordsworthian in its reverence, the close and patient observation of an artist, the peculiar humor of a genial American in the study of men and things." To such expressions as these, Mr. George William Curtis, voicing the sentiment of his

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own countrymen, said of him : "Mr. William Hamilton Gibson's reputation as one of the first of modern artists for wood-engraving, is established and secure." "It is hard to believe that the blended softness, vigor, and individuality of the art could go further than in the illustrations of this choice volume."

He had found time during the year for no little study and work in water-color, and even began to essay painting in oils. Despite a long illness of eight months he contributed to several exhibitions and finished a number of new pictures. His goal was always to be a painter. In all the heat of his endeavor and the intoxication of his success he never forgot his ideals, never slackened his march toward the highest art in the most approved forms and mediums.

In May, 1883, his first child was born, and he was soon writing to "Dear Mother Gunn," in answer to her importunate inquiries, all about the new-comer. "Hamilton Gibson then is his name I understand, though not a gift from me, but simply because I have not the heart to refuse anything to my precious wife just now. So she has christened him as above in spite of much foreboding on my part, as to the probable curtailment of his cognomen among the contemporaneous specimens of his genus in the days which will soon be upon us. I have waited so long for this little angel to come, that I hardly dare realize to the full

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the happiness which has befallen me lest I awake in bitterness to find it all a tantalizing dream. . . . But ere long I suppose the reality will be brought home to me more effectually,—a few hours' perambulating in the 'wee sma' hours' every night for a week or two would dispel all doubts or fears, and place the experience on the basis of solid prosaic reality. At present writing, however, I can truthfully say, as every antecedent pa has done, that he is the best baby alive, quiet, absorbent, and somnolent to a degree of perfection which leaves nothing to be desired. Only last night, after taking his meal, (at least that is what I understand they feed him on) he was placed upon his pillow at ten o'clock and slept like a chrysalis till half-past five this morning. During the day to be sure he is not quiescent for quite so long a period, as then nature seems to 'abhor the vacuum' more than ever."

The year 1883 was devoted to the illustration of E. P. Roe's "Nature's Serial Story," a work into which he entered with heartiness and sympathy. Much time, too, was given to the preparation of the "Memorial" of Mr. Gunn, a volume issued under the direction of an association of his old pupils, commemorative of his striking personality and of the old days in the school at Washington. This book was finely illustrated by the hand of his loving pupil, who also wrote the introduction which was to have been written by Mr. Beecher, whose death occurred while the

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God's Miracle

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work was in progress. The summer vacation was spent, as usual, in hard work, the scene of his labors being in the White Mountains, at Lake George, ending with two weeks in Washington, where he took many photographs and made many sketches for the "Memorial." There was much painting in water-color for exhibitions here and there, with many sales at good prices. From time to time in 1885 and 1886 he furnished more of the charming articles which the public had learned to look for and to love. "Harper's Magazine" for October, 1886, contained a surprise and a new delight to his readers in the shape of the famous "Back-Yard Studies," in which he challenged the belief of the average man, and even astonished himself with the story of the variety of wild-flowers which he found growing in his city yard. A friend had expressed a longing to study wild flowers, but felt that there was no hope of gratifying herself as long as she lived in the city. Gibson advised her to utilize her back-yard, and ventured the guess that he could gather twenty-five different species of plants in his grass-patch, as the harvest of the seed sown by the breezes, the insects, and occasional birds. The next morning he made a count, and was himself surprised to see his "finds" running up to a total of sixty-four different species. The description of his wild garden in these sordid and unromantic surroundings made him new friends and strengthened his old ones in the assurance

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that he would never fail them in nature-wisdom or originality of vein. For he showed, as he himself maintained, how the back-yard "may become a means of grace, and with its welcome, peaceful symbols of the woodside and the hay-field, the wood-path, pasture, and the farmyard, serve to reawaken and console the latent yearnings of our unfortunate metropolitan exile." In the fall of 1886 the new volume appeared, to greet a larger public than ever, enthusiastic in its praise and appreciation. One of his reviewers linked his name most happily with some of the favorites of an earlier day. "At the Christmas season of the last generation there was a general anticipation of a new holiday book from Dickens and Thackeray, and the expectation was rewarded year after year. We are coming to cherish the same hope of a Christmas book from William Hamilton Gibson." With equal fitness this writer assigned him that place which the popular consensus had now begun to allot him, saying, "Mr. Gibson must take his place, as an acute and delightful observer of nature, with Gilbert White, and Henry Thoreau, and John Burroughs." His niche was secure, his right to it now unquestioned ; and all qualified judges saw that he had in himself a quality quite his own, a temperament, a gift, a qualification to sound his own note and deliver a fresh message.

The next months ensuing Gibson spent in working up material for the illustration of a series of papers

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prepared by Mr. Charles Dudley Warner and Mrs. Rebecca Harding Davis, descriptive of life and nature in the South. In March, 1886, he had left New York to join Mr. Warner in New Orleans. They made a tour, two months in length, covering Georgia, Alabama, and Louisiana, in which he took over five hundred photographs and accumulated much material in notes and sketches. A bright and picturesque letter to his wife gives a fine reminiscence of this delightful trip.

"NEW IBERIA, LA.
"*May 12/86.*

"MY DEAR WIFE:—

"I have just returned from a trip in the outlying country to find your two letters awaiting me. Since leaving New Orleans I have been gadding about the country north, east, south and west, and am not yet done. The Téche country is mightily interesting if one can only live through it. The days come and go and are filled with enjoyment, but as to the night no man knoweth what may be in store for him. My hotel experiences would interest you, but I cannot write them. I left New Orleans with a Mr. William King as a companion, a young man who knows the country thoroughly and whose company Mr. Warner recommended I should request, as Warner was obliged to leave for the north. By the time we reach New Orleans again about five days hence,

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we shall have traveled together over one thousand miles of the Téche and other Louisiana territory. The weather has been charming, no hot weather which has not been deliciously tempered by the never failing breeze from the gulf. Cool breezy nights.

"We have driven for a whole day over a prairie peopled with all sorts of wild things in the way of birds. Meadow larks, plover, snipe, white and blue herons, buzzards, egrets, many birds so tame that they could easily be killed by a cut of my whip. We drove through acres and acres of blue flag in blossom, and for miles pursued the shaded roads through dense woods draped in the ever-present festoons of moss—in this country seen in its fullest perfection, every tree being laden with it, hanging like heavy trailing curtains, sometimes twenty feet in length. The effect in a breeze is indescribably beautiful. The Téche Country is the paradise of Louisiana, and comes as a welcome contrast to the filth and squalor of the city of New Orleans with which I was so nauseated. To-night we leave for the Averys'. We shall arrive there to-night and I anticipate a fine time visiting Jefferson's Island and making trips up the various bayous. We shall try to get away from there Friday evening in time to get the steamer 'Iberia' here by which we shall return, through a sail of about 300 miles by lake, bayou, and Mississippi River to New Orleans. Thereat I shall spend about three days and

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then start for the homeward trip, stopping over at Mobile for a day or so. I will be home about June 1 as I originally approximated.

"Of course you know that I am anxious to be at home again. The only way that I can keep my spirits is to throw my mind into the work and interest myself with my surroundings. In the main my health has been good, in fact, excellent, in spite of starvation cookery and God-forsaken hostelries which anywhere else under heaven would be considered good material for bonfires and their proprietors hung.

"A beautiful country and full of interest, if, forsooth, one might exist without a stomach. Everything is Creole—Creole cows, Creole milk, Creole eggs—even the 'niggers' are Creoles, and all speak French. My limited vocabulary of pure Parisian French has stood a heavy drain and has occasionally precipitated upon my hearers consequences which I feared would prove serious ;—item—Night before last we stopped in a hamlet of shanties and at last found the 'Hotel,' kept by a talkative, voluble French idiot and his wife. The only guest bed in the shebang I occupied, and Mr. King slept on a mattress on the floor in another room. I was tired and suffering from an attack of nervous dyspepsia, from the greasy grub which I had been forced to eat in the face of starvation (everything here even a boiled egg is taught to swim in hot fat, and is only rescued therefrom by the famished boarder, who

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sometimes is obliged to bolt it after scraping off the congealed lard). It was with difficulty that I could get to sleep on the night in question, owing to my indisposition, together with a certain nervous apprehension as to the census of my immediate surroundings. I had barely dropped off into a snooze when I was startled by the movement of the window shutter near my bed, when looking, I observed a mule who was making a meal of a table-cloth near my bed. Once more after lying awake an hour I had begun to congratulate myself on prospects of slumber, when a shrill piercing note of a mocking-bird struck up its piccolo in the dead of night, another and another joined in the chorus, and kept this up for an hour before it dawned upon me that the birds were in cages on the farther side of the very partition of my room. On which discovery you may perhaps imagine how the limited French vocabulary at my command was exhausted and reinforced, but to no purpose. I raved and swore in Dutch, French, and Pidgeon English and was at length compelled to yell my colored servant (driver, servant, and interpreter) from his slumbers and make him translate a short address to the French idiot (who snorted in blissful sleep in concert with his spouse in another quarter of the shanty) to the effect that the offending birds be immediately chucked out of doors, beheaded, or strangled. The shrieking trio was finally removed

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to the rear but my sleep was ruined for that night. Only toward morning after dawn had just begun to lighten the east did I begin to feel drowsy, but at this point the 'moqueurs' were again restored to their original places and I was compelled to have them again removed, and by this time Monsieur and Madame were up and about preparing our morning 'grease' which they seemed to be doing by sheer force of lungs and belaboring of pans and kettles.

"At breakfast I drank the proprietor's health.

"'Monsieur, votre santé! Votre hospitalité est magnifique! Votre table est bien gré! Votre moqueur—! *Ah! Votre moqueur!* (a pause with dramatic enthusiasm, then continuing) vous procurez deux, trois, quatre plus moqueurs! et votre hôtel est perfection!'

"This eloquent outburst greatly amused the Madame, but the old man seemed 'busting' with suppressed emotion, which probably, had he then been in pocket for his bill, would have shown some outward token.

"We left this place for the day and after settling the bill, we told them that we would leave our satchels until we returned in the evening, whereupon 'la madame' through my interpreter, asked me if she should prepare a meal for us for evening. I asked her in reply if she would cook anything I wished, to order. She replied 'Oui! anything I can get.' Whereupon I ordered *'three moqueurs on toast!'*

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much to her discomfiture, and she grumbled to herself as she left us, which grumble being translated would signify, 'My God! three mocking birds! that feast would cost you thirty dollars!'"

The rest of the year was spent in working up the material thus gathered, and much of the following winter and spring. The summer of 1887 was passed in Washington, Connecticut, where, as a note in his journal tells us, he "spent a very busy season. Made many drawings for two prospective articles on 'Midnight Rambles' and 'Insect Botanists,' besides many flower-studies and a number of water-colors. Very busy on the 'Memorial' volume to Mr. Gunn. Made a large number of drawings for botany." The last remark refers to a large scheme which now possessed his teeming brain, a plan to write an illustrated botany. He never dropped his purpose,—indeed, abandoned plans were unknown in his life-history,—and before his death he had accumulated over 1500 drawings toward such a work. There have been many such undertakings put forth, successful and valuable. But it is impossible to think without a pang of the wonderful work he would have made out of his accurate knowledge and his matchless art!

The "Memorial" was published in 1887, and he went on with the articles and the water-colors, busy

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all the time, and always laying out work in advance of his swiftest execution. The spring of 1888 brought the opportunity for a trip to Europe, which included a tour in Great Britain, France, Holland, and Switzerland, with a fortnight in London and another in Paris. His camera and his pencil were both busy, but the new experiences made only an episode in his busy life. He was interested in all the art he saw, and the life of the people appealed to him there, as it did at home. A letter describing his impressions of Holland shows the spirit in which he traveled and the things he elected to see.

"Since last writing you I have enjoyed a week (or more I fear) of rare incident and experience, my days being so full and my evenings so tired that I have failed again in my good intentions as to frequency of letters.

"I hurried your last letter into the mail and am somewhat in doubt whether it reached the Queenstown post in time. Since that writing we (which means a party of Van Ingen, Willis, Roberts, McGrath, Dunthorne and myself) have visited successively Flushing, Rotterdam, The Hague, Dordrecht, Scheveningen, Amsterdam and Brussels. Of course our visit has been brief as the period of time represented has been but four days. The picture galleries have received most of our attention at these places, but at Dordrecht and Scheveningen we found the living pictures

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unmatched by any in the respective art exhibitions. Dort is a perfect treasure of a place, pictorially considered, and I shall live in hopes of revisiting it in the future more at my leisure and with an eye to 'material.' You would have been charmed with the quaintness of this old Dutch village with its Venice-like canals, its queer inhabitants, its hundreds of wind-mills and picturesque old boats. We hired a boat and guide and rowed for hours upon one of these meandering waterways—under arched bridges beneath which we had to stoop; beneath overhanging balconies bright with flowering plants and with an occasional saucy or coquettish face half disclosed between the Venetian blinds at the windows, occasionally with a giggle accompaniment or a handkerchief manœuvered in a manner which would have done credit to a French or Spanish coquette. The little Dutch 'yongen' or Deutscher 'pups' saluted us with questionable slang or with stones or what-not, at every private quay or alley-way opening on the canal and altogether our turnout with its noisy exclamatory cargo was a great center of attraction to contiguous neighborhoods whose windows were usually filled with curious spectators mostly on a broad grin of Dutch proportions and typical comeliness, and 't is true occasionally relieved by a disclosure which our Scotch friend Roberts assured us was 'bonny' and which commentary I was pleased to verify, and which

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moreover was the signal of a chorus of 'ah's' from our bateau that would have done credit to a West Brighton populace at the 'busting' of a rocket. Our trip was occasionally varied by a landing at some quaint quay or alley, and a rummaging visit to some musty old bric-a-brac den or junk shop. The streets were of the queerest in architecture and life—queer old women with brass headgear and huge sabots or wooden shoes, and voices like a fog-horn, peddling their green goods, their eggs, milk or whatever, their treasures suspended from yokes, and borne with apparent pleasure. I have bought one of their huge brass milk cans and a few other of their distinguishing paraphernalia for our front parlor over the mantel—(a part of the foregoing was penned late last night but I was so utterly tired that I had to quit in the midst of a sentence which I presume you can detect by examination). I am in the same condition to-night (Friday, May 25th), having spent seven mortal hours on my feet in the 'Louvre' to say nothing of the exhaustion which the visit has brought to the other end of my person. Yesterday I was seven hours at the Salon, viewing the miles of pictures and occasionally imagining myself in a harem or in a feminine quarter of a Turkish bath by mistake. I shall go again to-morrow, as I did not see one half of the bathers yesterday and besides there are a few landscapes that I want to get a peep at, if the fleshly charmers will only give a fellow

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half a chance. 5000 pictures!!! to say nothing of about three acres of statuary!

"I shall spend a week here at Paris and shall then leave for Switzerland, including Chamounix, Interlaken, Rigi, Lucerne, &c., returning after about a week's trip direct to London there to spend the few days prior to my return. I shall sail with Van Ingen on the 'Adriatic' June 13th and shall be most happy to be with my loved ones again. How truly do we measure time by voluminousness of incident. Our Holland trip of 4 days seemed like a month and it seems a half year since I left you in New York. In my hours—say rather moments—of repose I am homesick and my tired feeling adds to the nostalgia. Mr. Van Ingen and McGrath left me in my tracks to-day, and the way I am dispensing my hybrid French to the natives hereabouts is a case of wilful persecution. But I get along better than I would have supposed. I have raked up my old vocabulary and with a reinforcement of grins, gesticulations and shrugs, it is surprising how quickly my victim succumbs. Once in a while it is true I chance upon an ass who don't catch on, but as a rule I manage to make my patient comprehend my intentions. Everything thus goes well until *he* starts in, and the average Frenchman can pronounce three words at once with most facile ease and evident delight. I generally wait until he has run through his dictionary from Alfred to Omaha and then

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inform him that I have n't understood a word that he has been saying and beg of him to begin again and go slow. When he comprehends that he is to be remunerated by *time,* and not by the *job,* and turns out words instead of mush, his lingo is not half so overpowering or so enigmatical. I had the honor to compliment a waiter to-day upon his excellent French when indulged in moderation, bringing a touching parable to my rescue, likening his 'escargot' speech to my dish of small isolated boiled potatoes and his 'chemin du fer' French to my 'haricot' much to his delight and comprehension."

In 1888 his second son was born, and the happy father writes of the new baby to Colonel Gibson, excusing himself for not having made him a visit: "I have found that we cannot always bend circumstances to our wills, especially when those aforesaid circumstances are materialized in the shape of bills payable, taxes, insurance, houses, wives (I beg pardon, *wife*), and babies! Yes, babies! For Hamilton Jr. no longer runs this establishment; I enclose the counterfeit presentment of a successor of his who makes us all toe the mark, and bosses the entire household. Is it possible that his fame has not reached your latitude? He has his own way hereabouts, and we imagined that the limits of New England had at least been brought within earshot of his lungs. But he is a darling, if he does take after his daddy. His name

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is Dana Gibson; (not Charles A.) but old Judge Dana, Richard Dana, his ancestor."

The year 1889 found him busy with the erection of a new story to his Brooklyn house and his instalment there in a studio which became a favorite theme for newspaper gossip and description. In Washington, too, he acquired another studio for his summer days, in the shape of a little old schoolhouse which was familiar to him in his boyhood. In the autumn of this year he recorded the idea of a "prospective work 'Eyes to the Blind' to be prepared with a view to book publication. Made proposition to Harpers who requested me to run the same through the year in 'Young People,' one page each, with about 200 drawings." This, is of course, that favorite work which finally took the name of "Sharp Eyes" and attained such wide popularity. Writing of this new scheme to his friend Colonel Gibson, in Fryeburg, Maine, he opens his mind and heart in his own direct and exuberant way. The letter was written in August, 1890.

"This series will run through the year, and you may like to know how it all came about. Know then that my head gradually got so big with the muchness of learning that I had to rig up a safety valve of some sort, or *bust!* This would have been an unpleasant denouement for myself and especially tough on the immediate surroundings, human or otherwise, and so I hit upon a

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plan to put all my goods in the show window and get credit for a big reinforcement behind the counter! Great scheme! eh! (that is if they only won't try to get a look inside!) My note-books, visible and intangible, have been multiplying from year to year with no available opportunities of keeping pace with them in my accustomed magazine facilities. So I concluded to materialize my material in the form of a dainty book, comprising the more interesting incidents of my journal, arranging the incidents or episodes chronologically—a timely item or two for each week in the year, so that the book might serve as a sort of pictorial reference calendar for the saunterer, affording him at least some few hints of the rich store of wonders which surround him unheeded in every field and by every path. I believe there is real true missionary possibility in such a book as that. My plan completed and a little material duly prepared I broached the matter to the Harpers. They jumped at it at once, and much to my astonishment made me the offer to run it for the entire year of 52 weeks in the 'Young People,' an unheard of thing! and something which I had never dreamed of. By this arrangement I not only received much more liberal compensation for the large number of designs than would have been financially possible on the first basis, but in addition realized generously upon the letter press which in the original plan would have been furnished gratis on the customary plan of

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books paying royalty. In addition to this, inasmuch as the cost of the entire series would of course be charged to the 'Y. P.' it gave me a bigger margin both in number and scope of the designs, so that the book as now shaped will be more generously illustrated than as first planned. The series will end with the Xmas number and will then begin to take its book form with numerous fresh additions of tail-pieces and other morceaux, comprising some 300 illustrations. It will not be issued however until the Christmas of 1891 as I have already on the press a volume for the coming season.

"The title of this—my fifth book—is 'Strolls by Starlight and Sunshine.' My two midnight articles taking the lead, and followed by my other magazine papers published during the last two years. 'Bird-Notes,' (Harper's), 'Bird-Cradles,' (Scribner's), 'Prehistoric Botanists,' (Century), and 'Wild Garden,' (Harper's), this September (now due).

"You shall see the volume as soon as you are likely to desire it, and whether you take any stock in it or not you will, I hope, give me credit of being a well meaning fellow anyhow.

"There! that's about as big a dose as even your friendship can stand, and so I 'll come around to my autograph and give you a rest—No—not yet either! I wonder if you can't do me a little favor, just for the sake of old times and in spite of my sins. In addition

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to all my other work I have been for years preparing a botany on a new plan, and nearly all the bloomin' things that grow in these parts have been victimized in my enthusiasm.

"There is one plant, perhaps two, which I remember to have seen and gathered on the sand at Lovell's pond, but which I never identified, which perhaps you could now help me to secure. A little low thing with a few yellow (or pink) blossoms growing on its extremity, and which I saw in profusion the last time I visited the spot with you. I am afraid that the season is too late, or will be when I could receive them from you, but if you can, after about twelve days, or rather about the date of the third of September gather the plants for me, enclose them in a tin spice box, no water, and mail them to me here at Washington, Conn., you will earn my thanks anew. Plants enclosed in tin boxes, with air-tight covers, will keep fresh for days—indeed for many days longer than the same plant would keep in a vase of water.

"And now, my dear friend, au revoir! I sincerely wish that we might meet again if only to clasp hands and exchange greeting, but until another year at least it seems improbable. To-morrow I leave to visit friends in the Adirondacks for two weeks returning here to keep my nose to the grindstone until November when I return to Brooklyn,

"Good bye, regards to all. W. H. G."

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In season for the holidays in 1890 "Strolls by Starlight and Sunshine" was ready; and Gibson had another surprise for the nature-lovers in the chapters on "A Midnight Ramble," and "Night Witchery." All he had done was to take his lantern and wander among the grasses and the wild-flowers as they slept, and to tell the story of what he saw and heard. But when he had done with them, his readers all felt, at second-hand, indeed, but keenly enough, as he himself had done, "We have explored a new world—a realm which we can look in the face on the morrow, with an exchange of recognition impossible yesterday." Edmund Clarence Stedman, suggesting possible choice of material for the "Library of American Literature," said of this article, "I scarcely believe that you or any one has of late written anything more novel or more poetic than your espionage in the camp of the flowers at midnight."

All the next year was devoted to work upon "Sharp Eyes," which appeared in the late autumn of 1891. The intent and scope of the book has been told in the author's letter to his friend. He puts his purpose succinctly in a paragraph of the introduction, which he quaintly entitled "Through My Spectacles": "'Sharp Eyes,' then, is, in brief, a cordial recommendation and invitation to walk the fields and woods with me and reap the perpetual harvest of a quiet eye, which Nature everywhere bestows; to witness with me the strange

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revelations of this wild *bal masqué*, to laugh, to admire, to study, to ponder, to philosophize,—between the lines,—to question, and always to rejoice and give thanks."

Meantime, he was hard at work pushing the studies for his botany. With the sketches he was making for this purpose, he was also making more water-colors, sending them to the various exhibitions, and arranging sales of his own. He was at work on new articles for the "Young People" continuing the unexhausted vein he had opened for these pages. For older readers he was beginning the articles on the cross-fertilization of flowers which foreshadowed the wonderful charts and lectures with which he delighted and informed the whole country. He had begun to lecture too, and he notes in his journal, July 23, 1891, "At Mrs. Van Ingen's suggestion, I have concluded to give a series of ten familiar talks on Nature, covering botany, entomology, and ornithology, two each week." This was the beginning of successive series of lectures, covering four years. From these home talks his work in this field grew and multiplied. Soon he was lecturing with these amazing charts before the clubs in New York, before colleges and schools, and finally before popular audiences. In the winter of 1893–94, he made the venture of a series of six lectures in Hardman Hall, New York City, which netted him the handsome sum of eight hundred and fifty dollars, and drew

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from the veteran manager, Major Pond, an expression of wonder: "The news of your success in Hardman Hall is phenomenal. I can assure you that you are the only man in the United States who could have done such a business."

Then the calls began to come from all over the country. The same energy, industry, and genius which he had put into his painting and his writing he threw with increasing intensity into this new work. In 1894 he lectured sixty-four times. His success in the new field was instant and complete. It was as thoroughgoing with scientific folk as it was with the children and the plain people. The press had nothing but wonder and commendations. It was an epoch in the popular presentation of scientific fact and research unequaled since the days of Agassiz.

But somehow, in the midst of this new interest and the engagements it brought, he found the time to bring out still another book, as novel and as fascinating as any of its predecessors; and though it dealt with what at first sight seemed an unlovely theme, it was perhaps the most beautiful of his volumes. Promptly on calendar time in 1895 came "Our Edible Mushrooms and Toadstoods," destined to be the forerunner of a fungus-literature growing with every year. Its accuracy satisfied the scientific; its information gratified the popular mind; its illustrations were a joy to the mushroom-hunters. And

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his originality in treatment gave a hint to the publishers which they have been quick to follow and which they will be sure to follow for many a year to come.

Two more books were to be added to the list of his collected writings, "Eye Spy," and "My Studio Neighbors," both volumes in the same vein as "Sharp Eyes," and made up of his magazine articles. But before they were gathered between covers, he had finished his brief career and had passed on. The last entry in his journal was made on June 12, 1896, to record, as did all his brief notes, nothing but a new item of work,—"Lecture, Holiday House." He was already in the grip of death. The fierce fires of a relentless industry had burned his forces to a cinder. Through the summer days he languished and drooped, yet would not wholly give over work, nor cease his planning. On the 16th of July, among the hills of Washington, he suddenly died from apoplexy. His overtaxed frame gave way, and, at the early age of forty-six, he slept the long sleep of the body, in the beautiful home he had reared for himself, among those dearest scenes.

Perhaps there is no more fitting close to this hurried sketch of his career than a reference to this beautiful home which he made for himself out of the earnings of his toil, and which seems to have embodied the desires and the noble purposes of his whole life. It

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was natural, inevitable, than he should choose Washington as the site of this new hearthstone. He located it upon a hillside sloping to the river-valley, with a long and entrancing outlook to distant southern hills. He left the wild-flowers to grow undisturbed upon his lawns, and the clumps of low trees which bore their crimson cones in August gave him the right to call the new estate "The Sumacs." Here he planted his house, building first of all a story of stones gathered from the fields and old walls roundabout. Then a "story-and-a-half," to use New England phraseology, a tasteful adaptation of old Yankee architecture, with hip roof and low studding. Broad piazzas surrounded it, a great hall welcomed the guest, and inviting rooms with enticing prospects through great windows gave a sense of comfortable space within. To complete the ideal of a home, the great fireplace stood ready for the winter backlog, or bore a screen of boughs in summer and in autumn. How bitter the irony of life, in that as soon as he had reared this shrine for his domestic affections, amid scenes for which he had been yearning all his days, imprisoned in the city, among friends of his boyhood, who loved him as few men are loved—what a strange and baffling lot was his, to be summoned from it all, and from the larger future which seemed opening before his eager heart!

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The Sumacs

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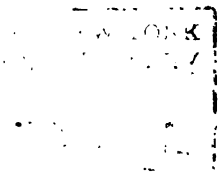

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CHAPTER IV

WITH PENCIL AND BRUSH

IT is hard to say whether Gibson was first a naturalist and afterwards an artist, or first an artist and afterwards a naturalist. Art was his mode of expression; but his knowledge of nature furnished the material of what he would express. Art was his speech, but nature was his theme. In point of time there was no difference in the development of these two sides of his nature. His boyhood passion seemed to divide between studying nature and drawing pictures. He wrote of himself in "Pastoral Days" (p. 66): "Insect-hunting had always been a passion with me. Large collections of moths and butterflies had many times accumulated under my hands, only to meet destruction through boyish inexperience; and even in childhood the love for the insect and the passion for the pencil strove hard for the ascendency, and were only reconciled by a combination which filled my sketch-book with studies of insect life."

His letters are equally full of the nature-subjects he is treating and of the ways in which he is treating

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them. But there is no question of the strong, irrepressible need of his spirit which drove him to self-expression by pencil and brush. "I am fairly crazy to get to painting," he said to a friend at the beginning of the last summer of his life. "My lecture course and other business matters have kept me from using my brush lately, and I long to get my colors and go to work." That was a remark which reveals his whole life, his constant mood. Not only was he always anxious to be at work, but he wanted to be at work with his colors. This urgency drove him to art as a profession. It lightened all his busy years. It ranked him by divine right among the best of American artists.

He was a thorough artist in his love of the technical side of his work. He delighted in mastery of the materials of art. He liked the problems growing out of them. He knew the tools of his craft, and never was hampered by any uncertainty as to what he could do with the means at his command. His use of pencil and brush began early, and he soon knew the possibilities of black and white and water-colors. He was quick to learn the special art of drawing upon wood, for the engraver. He had no fastidious scruples against the camera, but was swift to resort to it and learn its possibilities and make it into a tool to shape his thought. When he turned to color as a medium of expression, he did so with all the en-

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Pen-and-Ink Sketch
From a Letter

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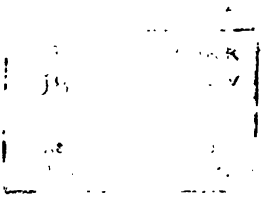

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thusiam of a true believer in its power, and a purpose to get at all its resources. Although so much of his early work was translated to the world by the wood-engraver, yet when wood-engraving began to decline, and the publishers took to process-work, and the "half-tone" crowded out the fine, laborious work of the burin, Gibson was not in the least dismayed. He wasted no time or sentiment in mourning the decadent methods, but sought at once to learn the utmost what the new methods would yield to a determined and artistic mind. How successful he was is well shown in that beautiful volume which won such instant favor with his later constituency, "Sharp Eyes." Its delicate half-tones vie with the wood-engraving in expressiveness, in delicacy, and in poetic feeling; and they are a standing testimony to the artist's versatility and technical energy. He was never at a loss for a means of expression. The rudest tools were converted to delicate and sufficient inplements in his fingers. There are letters from him describing some illustration of his or some painting, in which the pen and ink with which he wrote were made to sketch his work so vividly that one is tempted to rate the *tour-de-force* of the written page as fine a show of power as the picture it illustrated.

His work, moreover, was strong not only in its mastery of the science of expression, but by its fidelity to the facts of science in its subject-matter. It was a flat

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refutation of the doctrine, so dear to shallow sentimentalists, that the progress of science must weaken the power and circumscribe the field of art. There is much misleading talk to the effect that science is filching from the realm of the imagination, the kingdom where art thrives, and by its cold light is taking all the glow and loveliness out of the atmosphere in which the fancy has been wont to see its fairest visions. But almost any one of Gibson's illustrations of natural history, of botanical subjects, or of open-air life and scenery sufficiently refutes this theory. Here is a mind at once faithful to the scientific method, and free in its artistic spirit. Here is the accuracy of the scientist's eye and the artist's creative imagination. Turning the pages of "Sharp Eyes," or indeed almost any of his books, one knows not which to praise the more, his close observation of fact or his easy translation of it into the dress of fancy. One of his critics said: "His pictures sometimes seem ideal, they are wrought with such a light and painstaking touch. Yet close analysis will show them to be almost photographic in their accuracy." However freely his fancy deals with the facts, he never violates their logic, nor misrepresents their substance. Mr. Roe, in a letter to Gibson once told him: "You understand nature, and are capable of seeing her as she exists. Most other artists have conventional ideas of nature. You can take an actual scene and reproduce it, while at the same time idealizing it." His methods are a triumphant ex-

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ample of the scientific use of the imagination, and of the imaginative presentation of science. The most hardened Gradgrinds of research could find no fault with his facts, but were astonished and put to confusion by his power to suffuse reality with the glow of a poetic fancy. One critic, writing in the "New York Tribune," did say of him, in the tone of one pointing out a limitation, "Nimble and agile as he was of intellect, he did not possess breadth and scope of judgment, nor maintain a deliberate balance of interests." But even this far-fetched comment did not deny his fidelity to the facts, but only claimed a tendency to give them wrong values; and moreover the critic was reckoning without a large knowledge of his mind. He confuses Gibson's business as an artist with what his business might have been as a mere naturalist, and in doing so makes the common mistake of disparaging what is done by showing that it is not something which was not attempted.

Here, for instance, in a chapter on "Ballooning Seeds," Gibson draws across a page what he calls a "fanciful eddy," wafting up a swarm of seeds, which fly abroad on the autumn breeze. Every form in the airy sketch is accurate enough for a text-book, yet the whole is fit for the illustration of a poem. Again, in "A Masquerade of Stamens," his pencil leads down the page out of a sunny meadow a long procession which, beginning in the grasses of the foreground, develops into the exactly drawn forms of a score of

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curiously fashioned stamens. The illustrations for "Queer Fruits from the Bee's Basket," with its decorated initial, showing just the right bee, investigating just the right flower; the laden bees hastening from the clump of bushes in the foreground to the distant hives behind the farmhouse; and finally the sketch at the close, of a group of the odd forms of pollen-dust which the microscope reveals;—these are all examples of a fancy which only serves to illumine, throw light upon, the fact, but never to distort it or to pervert it. In this phase of his work, Gibson carries the office of the illustrator to its highest possible point, and shows all its dignity and power.

He did all this in his own way. No artist of our generation was more thoroughly individual in his methods and in his aim. He sought what his own spirit loved and longed for. He saw with no eyes but his own. He drew and painted after his own fashion. His originality was absolute. He had none of the mannerisms of any man or any school but his own. He asked no one to tell him the color of the grass, or the fashion in which he should paint the clouds. What he did was his own work, what he saw was his own vision. What men called his "versatility" in the choice of "mediums" was his quick sense of fitness and of adaptation. His aim was never loyalty to a school, adherence to a method, repetition of a successful device of technique. It was always, rather, fidelity to nature,

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adaptation of the medium to the thing represented, variety of method to treat his various themes. If his style became characteristic, it was because he put his own strong mark on all his work. It was as much his own as his autograph. It was William Hamilton Gibson transferred to paper or canvas.

Gibson's success as an artist was as good for the American people as it was for himself. It was truly a "popular" success. The people, and a great many of them, secured it. For he spoke to them, and they made approving answer. It would be hard to name an artist of his generation who appealed to a larger public, whose work in the magazines was hailed with a heartier delight, whose name stood for a more definite pleasure and appreciation than his. The people liked his work, and they knew why they liked it. One of his most discriminating critics said of him, in 1888:

"Mr. Gibson's work has been essentially democratic, that is, has reached the many rather than the few, presenting to them studies of nature which stand for a great deal more than mere descriptive picturesqueness, because, as we have said before, they are informed not only with the feeling for the beautiful, but also with the scientific spirit of inquiry and a love of exact truth." To gain such universal approval without the slightest swerving from his artistic integrity, or any lowering of his artistic standard, was an

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immense triumph. He realized it, and it gave him great joy. His honest and ingenuous pride in the reception accorded to his early work is well shown in two brief notes to his mother, one in May, the other in July, 1878:

"The bird article is finished and the proofs are beginning to pour in. One or two of them are so fine that their fame has spread over the city, and I am besieged by engravers and artists to see them. One, a full-sized peacock's feather which takes up a full page of the magazine, is by far the most superb piece of wood-engraving that has ever been accomplished. It is spoken of in art-circles all over the city. It is the opening picture, and will create a sensation. The illustrations number sixteen in all, and Mr. Parsons told Mr. Beard and others that it was the most beautiful and at the same time the most expensive article the magazine had ever gotten up. Mr. Parsons told me that the drawings not only pleased him, but that they exceeded his highest expectations, and that he did not believe there was another man in this country or in any other that could excel them."

In similar vein, after the notices began to appear, he wrote again:

"BROOKLYN, *July 27, 1878.*

"DEAR MOTHER:—

"I send you to-day a copy of the 'Nation' containing notice of Harper's Magazine. The 'Nation'

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is a high authority and has the reputation of stating the truth. It seldom goes into ecstasies over anything, and such a notice as it has given of my 'birds' is considered by the Harpers as a magnificent compliment."

The qualities of his art in which the public delighted and which came to be characteristic of all his work, were refinement, gracefulness, and truth. He saw the finer qualities of nature, sought out her delicate beauties, loved her humbler moods, objects, episodes. He vindicated his own taste in the paragraph with which he prefaced the chapter on "Sap Bewitched," over the signature of "Plinius Secundus":

"We wonder at the mighty and monstrous shoulders of Elephants, we marvel at the strong necks of bulls: we keep a wondering at the ravening of tigers, and the shag manes of Lions: and yet in comparison of insects there is nothing wherein Nature and her whole power is more seen, neither sheweth she her might more than in these least creatures of all."

In the spirit of those words he wrought at his art. "These least creatures of all" found in him a loving exponent. He saw their charm, and he was not above interpreting it to others. The web of a spider, the nest of a bird, the down of the dandelion, the leaf of the jewel-weed, the tangle of grasses in a fence-corner, the vegetable contents of a city back-yard,— Gibson found beauties in all these least things, which he did not disdain to celebrate. He had learned from

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Thoreau, chief among American students and expositors of nature, the meaning of the proverb, "Natura maxima in minimis." His devotion to the Concord recluse, and to his methods, appears in his studies. That discipleship affected his artistic life. It inspired him in his choice of themes and it drew his eyes still closer to the lesser objects and humbler horizons. He wrote to a friend in 1888 :

"There are few authors whom I love more than Thoreau. . . . I have read him with love and reverence, and have visited his haunts as sacred ground, and have pictured those haunts in projected compositions, and yet hope to see them realized."

He had no apologies whatsoever for having elected the field of what men call the minor forms of life. He knew there was no such thing as major and minor in the things of nature. One may go in either direction and find infinity. A telescope is no more effective than a microscope ; and it begins to look as if the atoms would be found as marvelous as the universe. Gibson repeatedly preached this doctrine. In one place he said :

"There is often an almost inexhaustible field for botanic investigation even on a single fallen tree. My scientific friend already alluded to recently informed me, on his return from an exploring tour, that he had spent two days most delightfully and profitably in the study of the yield of a single dead

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At the Easel
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tree, and had surprised himself by a discovery by actual count of over a hundred distinct species of plants congregated upon it. Plumy dicentra clustered along its length, graceful sprays of the frost-flower, with its little spire of snow crystals, rose up here and there, scarlet berries of the Indian turnip glowed among the leaves, and, with the crowding beds of lycopodiums and mosses, its ferns and lichens, and host of fungous growths, it became an easy matter to extend the list of species into the second hundred. It is something worth remembering the next time we go into the woods."

Such study and such affection made him the guide of a great multitude of people in America, teaching them of beauties and graces they had never perceived for themselves. To him thousands of men and women were under the deepest obligation, because he gave knowledge that in small areas and in close quarters one may see great beauties and far-reaching powers and forces. He taught by his art the greatness of the little, the divinity of the familiar. He revealed the wonders of the every-day world, the miracles of the commonplace. He seemed to discern, and had the power to show others, the whole of nature in her humblest parts. He was the prophet of the unnoted and the unprized ; for when his appreciative pencil had drawn them, they straightway became noteworthy, brilliant, extraordinary.

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One feels all the power of this call of his to be the apostle of the unconsidered in a bit of rhapsody over the infinite pictures hung along any country road-side :

"See how the cool gray rails are relieved against that rich dark background of dense olive juniper, how they hide among the prickly foliage ! Look at that low-hanging branch which so exquisitely conceals the lowest rail as it emerges from its other side, and spreads out among the creeping briers that wreathe the ground with their shining leaves of crimson and deep bronze ! Could any art more daringly concentrate a rhapsody of color than nature has here done in bringing up that gorgeous spray of scarlet sumach, whose fern-like pinnate leaves are so richly massed against that background of dark evergreens ? And even in that single branch see the wondrous gradation of color, from purest green to purplish olive melting into crimson, and then to scarlet, and through orange into yellow, and all sustaining in its midst the clustered cone of berries of rich maroon ! Verily, it were almost an affront to sit down before such a shrine and attempt to match it in material pigment. A passing sketch, perhaps, that shall serve to aid the memory in the retirement of the studio, but a careful copy, *never !* until we can have a tenfold lease of life, and paint with sunbeams. But there is more still in this tantalizing ideal, for a luxuriant wild grape-

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vine, that shuts in the fence near by, sends toward us an adventurous branch that climbs the upright rail, and festoons itself from fence to tree, and hangs its luminous canopy over the crest of the yielding juniper. Even from where we stand we can see the pendent clusters of tiny grapes clearly shadowed against the translucent golden screen. Add to all this the charm of life and motion, with trembling leaves and branches bending in the breeze, with here and there a flitting shadow playing across the half hidden rails, and where can you find another such picture, its counterpart in beauty—where? perhaps its very neighbor, for all roadside pictures are 'hung upon the line,' they are all by the same great Master, and it is often difficult to choose."

Two letters must serve as types of hundreds which he received, from every quarter of this country and from England—from California and from Anticosti Island, from Minnesota and from Georgia. The people loved his work. It expressed things they all had felt. It revealed to them things they had never seen. It was at once interpretation and disclosure. They did not know how good it was technically, but they did realize that it was good art in substance and in spirit, and from grateful hearts and lives quickened and enriched by his genius they wrote him their letters of gratitude and recognition. This one is from a Massachusetts town:

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"B——, MASS., *Aug. 30, '90.*

DEAR MR. GIBSON :—

"Your exquisite drawings and no less delightful descriptions have been a constant delight and inspiration to me for ten years. I have often wanted to tell you so, but the fear that a letter of thanks might seem intrusive has kept me silent. You really must forgive me for writing now, however, for your 'group of pyrolas' has a fascination quite irresistible.

I resolutely close my Harper only to open again for one more long lingering look at their airy loveliness, and then of course must follow another peep at the lilies and the goodyera and the dainty fern fronds which seem to spring up as spontaneously under your pencil's magic as they do in our fern-filled woods of B——.

"Do you realize how much you have added to the joy of pastoral days, what an enchantment you have thrown around our highways and byways?

"Almost every favorite flower lives again for me in your illustrations, and many and many a time have I been lifted up and out of weariness or discouragement by your pen or pencil, for your word pictures are as vivid as the others.

"Let me thank you too for your suggestions. 'There is a spiritual body and there is a natural body,' and the atmosphere of the first is always around your work, always full of help for all who can discern it.

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"I am not an art connoisseur and should never dare express my opinion 'as one having authority,' but I do love beauty, and some of your beautiful woodland scenes, some ferns or mosses or flowers or birds have power to give 'thoughts that do often lie too deep for tears.' You reveal Nature's very soul and as a most ardent worshipper of Nature and as a child of the Heavenly Father whose thoughts you have so often interpreted, I want to thank you.

"May you have many long years to continue making the world happier, and may you receive as much sunshine in your own life as you have given others.

"Yours most sincerely,

"MARY SAWYER."

The other letter is from his pastor:

. . . . . .

"To me you are an interpreter of a word of God which is both older and newer than the one to the interpretation of which I have given my life. You have enabled a vaster congregation than any minister ever speaks to, to see in it a meaning before unseen, if not unsuspected. I am one of your congregation and I am your debtor for lessons, not merely of beauty, but of truth and purity, which cannot be put into words. In interpreting Nature you bring us nearer to God and the eternal beauty and goodness. For this, no less

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than for the autograph which hangs on our walls Mrs. Abbott and I heartily thank you.

"Yours sincerely,

"LYMAN ABBOTT.

"70 COLUMBIA HEIGHTS,

"7 April, 1888."

Gibson was a warm partisan of water-color as a medium of artistic expression. He believed thoroughly in the possibilities of that mode of painting, which, it will be noted, was by no means understood or well-developed in this country when he was beginning to paint. His views in reference to it are well set forth in a letter to his mother, describing his first picture for the Water Color Society's exhibition, written in the winter of 1874. He says:

"I am at present busily engaged on my water-color painting for the coming Spring exhibition. It is only just under way, but all who have seen it express much pleasure and enthusiasm at it and particularly admire my selection of a subject. It would be difficult to find a subject calculated to create such popular favor, and you know that a good selection in this particular is 'half the battle.' The idea is this: Subject, a 'Struggle for Life.' It is indicated by an old, old tree (an oak if you please) growing under all possible disadvantages, and besieged with a host of parasitic growths which threaten to sap its vitality and hasten its death. The trunk and main portion of a few

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branches only are shown and but one or two of them are possessed of any leafage. The near portion is devoid of bark and the exposed wood, by the action of the weather without and decay within, has become stained and broken. The interior is hollow, and the rich brown debris of its decomposing wood falls through a large irregular opening at the base of the trunk, and then spreading itself on a moss and lichen covered rock becomes the prey to brilliantly colored fungi and mother to many ferns. The tree is supposed to have started life near a rock and in the course of time its roots have grown over its surface and again by the action of time and other causes are now bare of bark and some of them dead. Higher in the tree, an unsightly gaping hollow presents itself, left after the fall of some dead and useless limb and this, collecting the rain water from each successive shower, has caused the gradual undermining of the tree and hurried it to its approaching death. Close beneath this opening, true to nature, sapping what little life blood still circulates in the part clings a luxuriant clump of the deadly agaric (touch wood) which may so often be seen on trees that have passed their better days. These are not all the burdens under which this aged subject is struggling. The mistletoe has fastened itself upon its only living branch, and parasitic vines innumerable clamber up and surround the trunk in their 'deadly embrace.' A brightly colored woodpecker

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has just alighted on the dying tree and finds food in plenty in the substance of decay. The whole picture is intended to suggest the idea of a struggle, and I know that I can make it so plain that anyone will realize my intention. A little pool of rain water lies at the foot of the rock and touching the roots which will give an additional effect of reflection, and what with this, the warm coloring of dried fallen leaves relieved by a group of delicate ferns, and other like growths, together with a strong play of sunlight on the whole, I see no reason why the picture should not be a good success and feel equal to rendering all that my imagination suggests and pictures. I have only just commenced, but enough is even now suggested to insure an at least attractive result. I have selected the medium of water-color because I believe that more can be done with that than most people are aware. I can work faster with water-color and secure just as brilliant effect as I could in oils. People in general do not know how much can be done with water-color, and I hope that I may live to show them."

Six years later, coming back to the same subject in a letter to Colonel Gibson, he defends water-color as a medium in the following hearty fashion:

"Concerning the 'water-color' subject, on which you say 'Of course water-color painting is not or cannot be high art, because it concerns itself too much with detail' (not verbatim but embodying your ex-

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The Struggle for Life
First Watercolor

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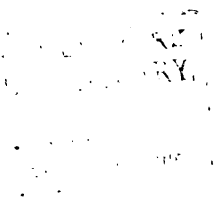

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pressed idea), I regret that a man in your position should decline from the standard to which his namesake had elevated him, and come down to such a statement as that. Color is color, whether it is mixed with water or oil, and you can make a broad flat tint in oil-color or water-color just as you choose. There is no reason why one should use 'one-hair brushes' in water-color painting either. Neither is there any reason why he should paint more detail in the one than in the other. You should have had one glimpse of the last W. C. Ex. It would have made you open your eyes. I never saw stronger or broader pictures in oil than some that were in that exhibit. Neither does the medium make a snap of difference, excepting so far as it cramps the hand that wields it. The talk about 'body color' is a 'hobby horse' for art critics to ride on when they get 'run out' of their vocabulary. I use both, so do several others, some to such an excess as to abuse it and spoil the result. It should not be used to tell as paint, but to express texture or relief in an object where such qualities are important requisites."

His own work in this medium showed the same steady and constant improvement as his work with the pencil. He toiled incessantly, and with his toil his power and facility grew. Remembering that he was self-taught in all his art-work; that he wholly lacked the training of the schools; that all his studies

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had to be made in the rush and under the pressure of his intensely busy life; yet that all of these studies were good enough to have a market value, and to take rank as works of art, his professional career is indeed a marvelous one. It was soon apparent that he was to take his place among the leading workers in color, and in an astonishingly short time he was recognized as one of the first water-colorists in America. He brought the same dash and fervor and sincerity to the color-box that he bestowed upon monotone. He was as ambitious to excel in this field as in his earlier one. He overcame heavy odds, chief among which was a popular prejudice that a man who does one thing well cannot do anything else. The public had come to rank him as a master in illustration. It was not readily converted to the notion that he might take as good a position in color-work. The critics talked, as critics will, in much this strain. "He is not a colorist," said one. "His best work is in monotone," said another. "He has won more admirers by his black-and-white work than he ever will win as a water-colorist," wrote a third. They evidently had not heard the tale of his early attempts, and had not the fear of his caricatures before them. Gibson lived to confute their judgment and to prove his power as a colorist. That he had the root of the matter in him, and that he was qualified by temperament to see and feel the power of nature's glowing

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hues he shows in a few lines of revelation, written out of his inmost spirit.

"How many beautiful pictures have I seen emerge from a cloud of dust upon a country road! How many of those pictures have again been half obliterated by the dust of after-years, only to be recalled to life by even so trivial a thing as the bleating of a lamb, the ring of a boyish laugh, or the homely music of the falling pasture bars!

"Pity for him whose heart knows no such sensitive and latent chord of sympathy to yield its harmony along the way, lending an inspiration to the present, while sanctifying the past, and drawing from its better memories a renewed delight in living! There is no walk in life, however dull or prosaic, no circumstance so commonplace, that they can stifle this ever-present melody. It sings in unison with nature in a thousand different keys—in a falling leaf or a cricket's song. The rain-drops of to-day but repeat the old-time patter on the garret-roof. The noisy katydid, whenever heard, is that same untiring nightly visitant outside your window to whose perpetual whim you loved to listen, and in fancy tantalize until you dropped off to sleep upon your pillow. This skimming swallow sailing near will never cross your path but so surely will he fly to those same old nests beneath the barn-yard eaves. If there is ever a blessed mood 'most musical, most melancholy,' it

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may be found beneath the refining influence of just such reminiscences; for whether or not there are added elements of home association, there are always a legion of indelible memories that love to linger along the country road and lane—highways and by-ways beloved of fancy—paths of recollection filled with footprints which not even the tempest can obliterate."

One rarely finds a profounder analysis of the true mean between breadth and detail, between effect and incident, nor a truer affirmation of one of the neglected sources of power in translating the larger aspects of the world than in the following:

"'There is as much finish in the right concealment of things as in the right exhibition of them.'

"Here is a key to the very heart of nature, if one will only use it. And I would but add my faint echo in an entreaty for a deeper sense of the infinity of nature's living tone and palpitating color—a plea for the more intelligent recognition of the elements that yield the tint which we vainly strive to imitate upon the canvas. Such knowledge will give a voice to every pigment on the palette, and to the brush an answering consciousness; for, whether disciple of a school or not, whether artist, poet, or layman, who can deny that such an attitude toward nature shall yield a harvest of deeper knowledge, and increased delight, not merely in the contemplation of the footprint, but even as truly in the study of the limitless panorama?

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"Is there not to me an added charm in the pink flush that mantles the side of yonder mountain-spur when I know so well that it is shed by the myriads of blossoms in an acre of glowing fire-weed? And as my eye follows the cool cloud-shadow as it glides down upon the mountain-slope, among the varied patchwork of its fields and farms, is there not a deepened significance imparted to every separate tint that tells me something of its being?

"If in the faint yellow checkered forms I see fields of billowing wheat and barley, and recall a hundred of their associations, or if from that quaintly-dotted patch there comes a whiff from a sweet-scented field, with its cocks of new-mown hay, its skimming swallows and ringing scythes, with here a luminous gray of sandy meadow fresh from the plough or harrow, and there a weed-grown copse lit up with golden-rod; if that kaleidoscopic medley of grays and olives and browns tells me of its pastures, with their tinkling bells, of its fragrant beds of everlasting, ferns, and hardhack, its trailing junipers and its moss-flecked bowlders, and each of these in turn draws me still closer, and whispers something of itself—the everlasting with its pendent jewel, the orchis with its little confidant and nursling, the gentian with its close-kept secret and its never-opened eye; if yonder bluish bloom means a field of blueberries to me, and that snowy sweep brings visions of the blossoming buckwheat field, with

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its symphony of humming bees—tell me, have I not only seen the mountain-slope, but have I not also heard its voice?"

Such a man could not keep out of the field of color. The feeling in him had to express itself. He must interpret on the canvas what he saw upon the hillside. It was inevitable that he should soon win as hearty praise for his color as he had for his drawing. Of course, the reputation could not be as wide as that he had achieved as illustrator in black and white. Fewer eyes could see his paintings than had been regaled with his illustrations. But when he laid down his brush, to paint no more, he had made a name for himself as one of the foremost American water-colorists.

It is but fair to say that his later experiences taught him a larger respect for "oil" as a medium of artistic expression. He was so eager to enlarge his field of work that he could not but venture upon experiments which brought to him a new sense of power and a knowledge of resources hitherto untouched. A few brief entries in his journal show his state of mind, and his prompt surrender of former prejudices. In March, 1881, he wrote:

"Painting for three weeks on oil-pictures for Academy Exhibition. First attempts in oil for exhibition. Trouble with medium. Final triumph of mind over matter. Painted a week or more on large autumn study commenced at Williamstown. Grew frantic

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and in a moment of frenzy took a piece of pasteboard and palette-knife and produced strongest picture I ever painted, in less than fifteen minutes,—a revelation which gave me confidence. A victorious fight with an oil-tube which had threatened to get the better of me."

A few days later he tried a similar study, with which he was even more satisfied. In another entry he says of this attempt:

"Much pleased with effect of sky I carried picture to a finish by four o'clock. Went out and ordered frame for it. A Diaz effect,—quite strong. What a revelation to me who, ten days ago, was disgusted with oil-color as a medium! I am all aglow with enthusiasm at finding another medium for the expression of my thoughts and feelings."

From this time forward he knew that there were still greater possibilities before him than he had realized, and with the knowledge came a fresh ambition, a stronger challenge to his artistic nature.

The "smoke-pictures" which he executed were one more example of his versatility and delight in new and daring methods. He did a great many of them, and they attracted much attention. They were, briefly, black-and-white pictures made by a gas flame upon a cardboard or paper ground. In his first experiments he held the paper before a horizontal flame and by passing one part after another across the flame,

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secured masses of lamp-black, which he found he could manipulate to great advantage. Landscape, cloud-effects, deep shadows of night or storm were easily within reach. Afterward he attached a rubber tube to his gas-fixture, and with a suitable nozzle was able to sit at his easel and manipulate the pipe as he would a brush. After the paper was well coated with varying shades of gray and black, he would work up the picture with brush or finger or palette-knife, deepening the tones, when desirable, by more smoke, lightening them by scraping and rubbing. The total effect was broad, yet marked by gradations so fine as to be almost beyond the reach of ordinary methods of black-and-white work; while the rich, velvety textures were of a depth quite remarkable. Though he never devised any method of "fixing" the smoke, yet after the lapse of a dozen years, these pictures, when preserved under glass, have kept all their original brilliancy and force.

But all that Gibson had done in his artistic career was to him only an apprenticeship. He meant more than he achieved. He was on the way to better things, when death stayed his feet. With all his tremendous intensity, his restless industry, his fulness of conception and scheme, he was yet a man of undreamed-of patience. He saw far ahead of what he had reached, and planned for it, and meant to attain it. He himself regarded all that he had done in black and

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white, in water-color, even his beginnings in oil, as only the preparation for a larger, stronger art, in which he should interpret the spiritual side of Nature. There was always before his mind a dream of the subtler phases of natural beauty, the deeper meaning she conveys to the listening soul. He was feeling, with more and more force every day that he lived, the spell of

> "The light that never was on sea or land,
> The consecration and the poet's dream,"

and the passion grew within him to paint, in the most permanent and adequate medium, the things he was coming to feel and to see. Art was really his goal. Painting was his crowning ambition. His own view of his life was that he had but just fitted himself for a worthier task, that he was just ready to begin the work to which he was called.

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CHAPTER V

THE OPEN EYE

WE have seen how the passion for the study of nature was born with Gibson, and grew with his growth. He was a naturalist by nature; and all his training strengthened in him the passion which made the young boy, with a "Cecropia" in sight, "feel like an eagle darting at her prey." The natural world was to him a perpetual attraction, a land to be explored, a mystery to be searched, a delight to be enjoyed. The frontispiece to his chapter "Across Lots" in "Highways and Byways" represents an upland shrubby pasture, beyond whose limits gleam the waters of a pond, backed by a round-topped hill. In the foreground stretches a rail fence, with a gateway whose bars are dropped; and this open pathway to the wild fields and waters he has suggestively entitled "An Invitation." That invitation was continually pressing upon him. He always felt it, outweighing all other calls, summoning him from every other career, bidding him take to the fields and the woods and the hills, to listen, to see, to learn, and to impart. In 1867, when he was a boy of seventeen, convalescing from a severe illness, he wrote to a dear friend:

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"Cypripedium Acaule"
(*"My Studio Neighbors"*)
Copyright, 1897, by Harper & Brothers

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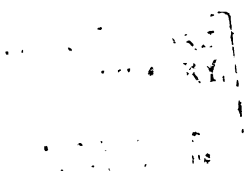

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"You ask me what I do all day. This question is very easily answered. It is the same thing over and over again day after day. The great part of the time I spend in the woods, alone. I start off about ten o'clock in the morning and ramble through the woods and thickets. There is one spot in particular which I frequent the most, because there are two wood-thrushes which invariably come and sing to me. This spot is a singular little dell. It is situated in front of a precipice two hundred feet high, in among ferns and large rocks which are shaded by hemlock trees. It is on these trees that the wood-thrushes sit and chant their songs by the hour. Oh, I do not believe I could be happy if this pleasure were taken away from me. I am always happy alone in the woods. I dare say I am destined to spend half my life in just such places. This is the daily program of the way I spend my time. Silly is n't it? But I can't help it. It is my nature to enjoy nature, and I mean to do it at every opportunity." That outburst struck the keynote of Gibson's life and spirit.

But his love of nature, like his knowledge of it, was broad and catholic. He was not a specialist in any narrow or pedantic sense. He was botanist, ornithologist, entomologist, biologist, all in one. A butterfly had as much interest for him as an evening-primrose, a chipmunk as a nuthatch. Everything was grist that came to his mill. Nothing could

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better illustrate this universal love of all living things, than a note which he left, on which he intended evidently to base a sketch. Imperfect as it is, it is an admirable illustration of his method and of his broad sympathy and interest. He begins with several experiments at a title, and then outlines his plan ; after which he enumerates the "available episodes," as he calls them, to fill the outline:

"'A Rare Day with the Speckled Trout. Speckled Beauties. A Rare Day's Trouting.' See Burroughs's 'Speckled Trout,' Prime's 'I go a-Fishing,' Isaak Walton.

"Begin : It was the 29th of June. A glimpse of a large platter of speckled trout, a one day's catch displayed with pride by a neighbor, revived my old-time zeal and reminded me that there was but one day left in which to beat the record. I consequently start off fully equipped, and meet with an interesting train of episodes, and an accumulation of a basket of specimens,—plants, insects, bird's nests. Following the course of the stream, the incidents are such as are perfectly appropriate to this setting and the season. A trout occasionally alluded to, as an accessory, jumping, etc.

"Or begin with quotation about 'Not even a minister is to be trusted on the subject of fish.' Fish stories. I have one to tell which however it may compare with others has at least the merit of truth. It is true that I once caught forty-nine trout, within

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an hour; but that was not a circumstance to the fortune which has often since befallen me. My last is a fair sample of these lucky days.

"End something in this vein,—after an enumeration of natural beauties: And, by the way, the trout? There in the rippling pools; for I left them all there! And yet there are those who would have followed my trail, and have brought home nothing but a basketful of dead fish. Finish with some apt quotation or quaint proverb, of how one went and brought back chaff, and another fetched the kernel."

It is plain that such a man as this did not love Nature for the sake of the contribution she made to his particular sport or his favorite study. He was one of that class whom Professor John Van Dyke has in mind, in entitling a certain book of his "Nature for Its Own Sake." He was out after anything that mother Nature vouchsafed to put in his way, and he gathered up reverently whatever he found, as something good for him because it came from her. Witness a single incident in which he modestly attributes to fortune what was quite as much due to his own habitual alertness.

"By a fortunate train of weather conditions I was once favored with a phenomenon by which almost the entire vegetable bill of fare of the winter birds, at least in the way of seeds, was spread out before me—brought to my feet, as it were.

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"Walking upon the firm and polished snow-crust, picking my way along a rail-fence at the foot of a steep, sloping pasture, I suddenly aroused into flight a flock of small birds from behind the bulwark of drifts with which the fence was hemmed in and partially buried. So loud was the united flutter of their wings that it at first suggested the whir of a partridge, until I saw it dissipated in the flock of smaller fry above the edge of the drift. They proved to be, as I remember, mostly snowbirds, white buntings, and goldfinches, though doubtless the cedar-birds, winter-wrens, tree-sparrows, pine and purple finches, were also among them. Their noisy flight was the signal for a general alarm all along the line, following the fence for several hundred feet, each zigzag corner sending up its winged bevy to perch and twitter upon the upper rails. Almost every projecting beam showed its chirruping sentinel.

"Interested to discover the secret of such a great feathery convocation, I crept up to the edge of the slippery drift and looked over. Beyond the fence rose the steep, white, glistening slope of the pasture, a distance of a furlong or more, its surface mottled with its brown withered vegetation. Following the rambling rails on either side were drifts of the most fantastic form, now and then almost peering above the fence riders, and between them ran a winding valley, in which the old fence seemed to be walking

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knee-deep in snow. It needed only a second glance into this hollow, whence the startled flocks had flown, to understand its attractiveness for the birds. Its depths were fairly littered with the choicest kind of allurement. The very cream of the pasture had flowed into this trough. It was the hopper which had received the entire wind-blown tribute of the weedy upland that looked down upon it, and of the overhanging woods far up the slope. Here were windrows of various seeds which had been dislodged from the weeds and trees and blown along the glassy snow to be caught in this convenient bin. The small goblet-shaped hollows around the projecting grass-stems were full to the brim with their good cheer, and the deeper vales and gullies were marked out everywhere by their brown meandering lines of intermingled chaff and seeds, often to the depth of two inches or more. A happy valley and a land of plenty, surely!

"A single handful of this grist taken up at random presented a surprising variety of elements, offering a wide choice for the most fastidious bird appetite. Curious to test this question further, I followed the fence for a long distance, occasionally sampling the meadow crumbs, and continually discovering some new ingredient of fruit or seed.

"Even the powdery chaff which I blew away in order to better reveal the larger morsels, proved to be

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the fine seed of various grasses and sedges; while among the more conspicuous which remained I noted the following considerable list, not to mention others which were then beyond my limited botanical knowledge. The seeds of the alder, birch, hemlock, ragweed, bur-marigold, and wild-carrot, were, perhaps, the most numerous and general. There was an exclusive colony of dried grapes assembled in one particular corner, doubtless laying their plans for a future arborescent monopoly of the rails in their vicinity. I found, also, numbers of larch seeds, both with and without their wings. Stag-horn-sumach, poison-ivy, ash, and hop-hornbeam representatives were frequent, and one chaffy handful, downy with golden-rod and aster seeds was lit up with a bright scarlet berry of black alder, like a tiny live coal in a bed of ashes. There was an occasional withered poke-berry to be met with, also fruits of sheep-berry, *ampelopsis*, juniper, and hawthorn. Another sample challenged my audacious familiarity with the fangs of a *Cenchrus* bur—the spiny fruit of the hedgehog grass, and still another was pretty well doctored with the poisonous seeds of stramonium, or jimson-weed, a line of which followed along the base of a drift like an open trail fuse of blasting powder leading up to a drill hole well calked with chaff. I recall also a few samaras of the tulip-tree, some hazel-nuts, oats, foxtail-grass seed, as well as several other queer diminutive forms which

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were unknown to me at the time, and which I cannot now identify from memory."

If we were to name the quality most characteristic of his work as a naturalist, it would be his habit of close and accurate observation. He saw more of the objects and incidents of the natural world in a square rod, than most men, even fairly observant, would see in a square mile. His books are a mass of evidence of the minuteness and the accuracy of his observations; and his note-books tell with still greater force the story of his patience and industry in preparing himself to report what he had seen. They show that he looked and saw for himself, and that his stories of plant and insect life are genuine studies, at first hand. A fine instance of the personal observation and actual experience which lay behind his work is afforded in the case of the chapter upon the "Bombardier-Beetle" in "Sharp Eyes." It is but a brief sketch, and reports only a curious performance on the part of a rather rare insect. But the observed facts on which it is based are set down in a record almost as long as the sketch itself, and in a manner to show the foundation of close attention and scrutiny to which he was continually subjecting the face of the earth. He writes under date of September 28th, at Williamstown, Massachusetts. The note begins with a memorandum to the effect that he carried his camera, with four plates, and that he observed tumble-bugs, ichneumon flies,

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and dung beetles. "In turning over a large stone, as is my habit in my walks, I discerned beneath it a little beetle which I at first supposed to be the common species, so closely resembling the Bombardier beetle of Europe. I had no special desire to capture it, and as it escaped beneath the grass and debris, my attention was arrested by a series of queer detonations, which made me suspect that some kind of a toad lay concealed near by. As I rummaged among the leaves I heard the queer report right at my fingers' ends, and at the same time noticed a tiny cloud of smoke emerging from the same quarter. The fact then dawned upon me that perhaps I had discovered a genuine Bombardier. A moment's search revealed the little fellow, and he discharged his battery six times or so. I captured him. I have not yet read of this species having been discovered in America. And certainly the allied species of this country possess no such detonating power. Before the detonation the body of the beetle would swell considerably. I kept the beetle and several of its allied species in a box some weeks afterward, and observed the explosion several times. Mrs. Gibson also heard it once and distinctly saw the small cloud of smoke of the volatile fluid. About two days after the capture of the Bombardier, I espied a beetle crawling on the floor of my room, and thinking that my pet had escaped I captured the insect. It proved to be another of the same species, but evidently

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of the other sex, and it was undoubtedly seeking for its imprisoned mate. There are numerous parallel instances in my own experience, but in this instance it is especially remarkable that I should find a second individual of a species so rare in America that I had never been able to find one before; and although I overturned at least a thousand stones during my stay in Williamstown, I was never able to discover another specimen."

A few weeks earlier in the same summer, he recorded another incident which shows his alertness of eye and the success with which it was constantly rewarded. He was on a trip to South Amboy, to study orchids in a conservatory there. He wrote:

"In a ramble near the station I found (as usual) exactly what I had started out to hunt for, a large patch of milkweed. This luck is an every day experience with me and has long since ceased to be a surprise. Once let my vision be set on the qui-vive for any given object, and I am led to it as by some irresistible intuition. No matter whether the object sought be a four-leaved clover, a certain flower, a rare caterpillar, a gold-bug or a 'walking-stick,' I am soon rewarded. I was desirous of discovering a specimen of an insect laden with pollen of milkweed. In less than ten minutes I found a large tract of pollen, in full bloom. In an instant more I detected a beautiful Cetonia beetle, nestling in a tuft of blossoms. Soon there came a small

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yellow hornet, which I captured. Its legs were fringed with the pollen-masses. So were the toes of the beetle."

Probably Gibson explains his own success in a sentence or two in one of his own chapters: "Anticipation is an equipment, the surest talisman to discovery, and anticipation may be quickened, either by pictorial hint or previous experience. The retina must be on the alert." That certainly was true of his own eye, and the fact that he was such an enthusiastic seeker accounts in large measure for the fact that he was such a successful finder.

His notebooks show the broad scope of his observations and of his studies. They cover every corner of natural life. One day he would go out and bring back material for pages of memoranda concerning the chase of what he believed to be a hermit thrush. On another day he makes an entry of fourteen varieties of golden-rod analyzed, six kinds of aster, and, as he adds, "many others." One page of his notes gives the results of careful experiments with three dozen dandelion blossoms, to determine how long the flower requires to pass from bud to the state when it floats away in silvery down. Another passage records in a minute description his first observation of the snapping of the witch-hazel seeds, to which he adds a list of a dozen subjects for illustration. He counts the number of different plants he finds in his city back-

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yard. He sets down the things seen in a walk through the Park with a lantern, from nine o'clock to eleven at night. He notes that on a certain June 29th, in the midst of a heavy thunder storm he heard the song of the Wilson thrush in the woods near his house. He makes liberal memoranda of the things most touching his attention after a fresh snow-fall. He sets down a list of more than a score of birds whose song he heard "in a continuous roundel," while sitting on his porch on a quiet Sunday. Thoreau in his hermit haunts at Walden was not more minute and attentive in his observations than this eager three-fold worker, hurrying from city to country and back to city again, equally busy at sketching, and writing, and observing. There are pages upon pages of his notes which read like the "Natural History of Selborne" in their detailed and leisurely narrative of things seen and heard in the fields and beside the brooks. In these records of his intermittent life in the country one never hears the faintest echo of the bustling round of the dweller in cities. He drops all that when he locks the door of his town-house behind him. Once in the open air he is again the free and buoyant youth, preoccupied only by the purposes and the pursuits which belong to the open air, the meadow, and the wood. Indeed it seems as if his early training and experiences, those school-days at the "Gunnery," the passions there born, the habits

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there fostered and confirmed, lay at the basis of all his life afield. He himself somewhere said: "To the average observer, if the eye is ever thus to be a means of grace, it must store up its harvest while hearts are light and life is new, when eyes are bright and undimmed. How many a prisoner caged in city walls is living on the harvest stored in free, unburdened youth, which has never been replenished." Perhaps that was true of this observer so much above the "average," and caught for half his time in the city's durance.

But even there he proved again the truth of Lovelace's lines:

> "Stone walls do not a prison make
> Nor iron bars a cage."

He made the city rural, and told others his secret:

"How little do we appreciate our opportunities for natural observation! Even under the most apparently discouraging and commonplace environment, what a neglected harvest! A back-yard city grass-plot, forsooth, what an invitation! Yet there is one interrogation to which the local naturalist is continually called to respond. If perchance he dwells in Connecticut, how repeatedly is he asked, 'Don't you find your particular locality in Connecticut a specially rich field for natural observation?' The botanist of New Jersey or the ornithologist of Esopus-on-Hudson is expected to give an affirmative reply to similar ques-

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Upland Meadows
From a Painting

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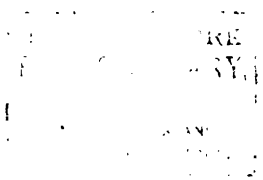

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tions concerning his chosen hunting-grounds, if, indeed, he does not avail himself of that happy aphorism with which Gilbert White was wont to instruct his questioners concerning the natural-history harvest of his beloved Selborne: 'That locality is always richest which is most observed.'

"With the possession of a back-yard, then, there is still hope for the most case-hardened cit. Let the quickened sod have its freedom of expression, and the grasses and weeds a respite from the sickle. Give the cold shoulder to the gardener, or, if need be, confine his arts to the fence border, and if you would repeat my experience, let the chrysanthemum claim the chief part of his attention. Twenty-five varieties of this plant bloomed in my borders last season, and they won my admiration, not less because of their beautiful display of color, which more than once relieved itself against a background of snow, than for the sterling wisdom they had displayed in biding their time until the rival wildlings of my grass-plot had seen their day.

"Next summer my square of turf shall again contribute to my enjoyment, yea, though I seed the whole community with thistles, tares, and fleabane, and run the gauntlet of the city ordinances."

Gibson was mindful of the exhortation, "To do good and to communicate, forget not." He could not contain himself, when he knew so many interesting

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things. He was a born teacher, a communicator and medium of knowledge. His studies all had a real if unconscious aim. He could not content himself with making them simply as a contribution to the field of facts, nor to the formation of theories. He wanted them to go farther and furnish information to other men. He craved an audience. He needed pupils, or at least auditors. It was not for the sake of being heard by others, or of hearing himself, either; he wanted others to know and to enjoy the great store of wonderful and fascinating things which mother Nature keeps in store for those who love her. He was a genuine missionary of science, an apostle of art, a herald of the wonders and beauties of the world. His social nature, eager for companionships, sought associates in knowledge. He loved to share what he had received. And he took others into his confidence as soon as he had unearthed a new secret of the world around us. He had the same spirit in scientific knowledge that sends men and women to preach the gospel to the ignorant and misguided. Indeed, in one of his letters, outlining the idea of his "Sharp Eyes," he uses the word "missionary," which he repeats in the introduction to that volume. The whole paragraph in which it occurs shows Gibson's feeling toward those who, "having eyes, see not:"

"Recognizing too the evident hunger for informa-

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tion concerning every-day objects in Nature, and that where one individual would write for enlightenment one hundred would wonder in silence and ten thousand would dwell in heedless ignorance, I realized that such a book might also go forth as a missionary to open the eyes of the blind, or at least to quicken a desire for fuller comprehension of the omnipresent marvel and beauty of the commonplace." One can realize how to such a nature, with such a sense of responsibility to others, a letter like the following would appeal, written by a friend of his who had given much of her time and strength to thought and labor for the interest of working girls:

"It has come to me through my association with these working girls that the meagerness of their lives does not so much mean the lack of *things* as the lack of *thoughts,* and I have been planning these talks which have been running through the winter in answer to the question 'What shall we think about?' I have asked every one to make the talk simple and and plain and I have tried to impress upon them that it is to be *only* a talk, not a lecture. I have also sought for simple themes, so that they need not be so far above the comprehension of the untrained minds that it would find no answering chord in their desires. If we can take the every-day things which you and I know are full of a wonderful interest, if one but know how to see them, and open their eyes

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to their wonders, I have believed that one would be opening doors into an undreamed-of fairy land to them. So you see why I come to you. You are one of the door-keepers into that fairy land. Will you open it for us?"

This desire to inform others kept him wholly free from anything like pedantry. He had none of the self-importance of men who try to make a little knowledge go a great way. Nor was he forgetful of the difficulties of less instructed minds. His style in picture and in speech was simple and direct. He had no passion for long words. He did not find it necessary to befog others with the technical speech of the specialists. He was the friend of children and simple country folk and the unlearned everywhere; and they will owe him a debt of gratitude that he spoke in their language and made them understand him. "I wonder," he once said, "if the time will ever come when a man may read a botanical work without understanding Latin." It was one of his ambitions to write such a book; he meant to make a botany in English, and illustrate it himself. Over fifteen hundred drawings, as we have seen, are in existence which he had accumulated with this work in view,—one more of the many schemes that fertile mind was projecting, never, alas! to be carried out.

Of all the great nature students of our time, Richard Jeffries ranks as the one most closely in touch with the sub-human world, the earth and all the life it bears in

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and on its bosom. His whole soul seems exquisitely in tune with the cosmos. He breathes with the respirations of the earth; he sighs with the breath of the winds; his senses and his thoughts sway with the bending of the grain and the waving of the tree-tops. "To know him," says his eulogist, Mr. Ellwanger, "is to approach nearer the heart of the flower, the mystic concave of the sky, and the elusive verge of the horizon." But in this respect he has a peer in William Hamilton Gibson. No man ever lived on friendlier terms with nature. As close, as accurate, as patient in his observation as any of the classic characters in nature love, he has a distinction all his own, a peculiar personal attitude toward all extra-human life. He feels and he expresses a sort of fellowship with life in other than human form. He accepts the lesser things as little brothers and sisters of the human. He gives the right hand of fellowship to whatever has life. He humanizes, if one may so term it, the life which lies below man's in the vital scale. What writer since the days of the primeval fairy tales ever brought the worlds of human life and other life so near each other? He seems a modern Siegfried, into whose ears the birds talk, and the grass whispers as it grows. When he comes back from an exploration into the insect realm close to his own doorstep, he reports what he has seen and heard precisely as if he were recounting the talk and doings of his own kind. He translates this life of

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beetle and spider and bee and ant and bird into the terms of human life and activity. He makes all life seem related to our lives, all being to appear of one substance, all to be worthy of interest, sympathy, love, and reverence. More than any other mind of his generation he leads us to feel that kinship of all life which Drummond has asserted in "The Ascent of Life," and which Professor Shaler has condensed into a phrase in calling it "The Bond of the Generations." That was a shrewd and sagacious disclosure of character, as well as a bit of fun, which led his mother to write, in the letter already quoted, "How are your friends and dear companions, the worms?" He was on terms of friendship with all living things. But to any mind at all sensitive to the real and deeper meaning of nature, to its spiritual origin, its profound unity, this underlying affinity of all its forms of life, there was a bit of true philosophy in the mother's comment. It was certainly truer and wiser than the criticism once made upon his intellectual temperament in the columns of the "Tribune." "So thoroughly," said this reviewer, "was he absorbed in the life of the humbler animals and plants that one suspects he was quite out of his element elsewhere. He was incapable of assigning them a relative place. To him they were always supreme. And because they were supreme they were colored and transformed by his humanizing and anthropomorphizing whimseys. He was always reading into them his own

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charming qualities of mind and heart, at the same time that he was imitating their own quickness and alertness. Indeed, natural life always appealed not so much to his imagination as to his fancy. He was absorbed in nature as a child is absorbed in its playthings. With all his minuteness of knowledge, he never fully and unqualifiedly faced the two great facts of the natural world, the struggle for existence, and the survival of the fittest. He exaggerated and instinctively transformed the natural world, and to the using of it as the source and stimulus of his own acute poetic ingenuity, devoted all his energies and interest." The criticism is brilliant, but superficial; and its kindly temper does not atone for its total injustice and perversion of values It is pure assumption, in the first place, to call the "struggle for existence, and the survival of the fittest" "the two great facts of the natural world." Who authorizes the ranking of those facts as prime or principal? Why not assign the highest place to the continuity of life, and the conservation of advantages, and the advance of types? These are quite as impressive facts as those others. And if they are suggestive of quite other inferences neither Gibson nor any nature lover need be disparaged for choosing to dwell upon those inferences. If he, like a growing company of later students and observers, was impressed with the fraternity of all lives, great and small, with the analogies between the human and the dumb creation, and

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felt the kinship of even insects and birds, with their later and more favored human cousins,—if we may not use a closer term,—why should this keener insight be called a "whimsey," and this deeper divination a "fancy"? And because he had a nature which thrilled and fired with the delight of knowledge and all the mental activity which it sets in motion, why should he be accused of using his growing store of that knowledge as a wine to warm his fancy and a spur to the making of similes? The fact is, Gibson not only saw and faced the law of struggle and of survival, but he saw a great deal more. And if he did not dwell upon these facts with the lugubrious emphasis which characterized so many of his contemporaries in science, it was not because he saw them out of relation, but in truer and clearer perspective. There has been too little sympathy, too little of the "humanizing and anthropomorphizing" spirit in scientific research. Gibson was a prophet, in advance of his day. What he was doing is fast becoming the dominant spirit of investigators. And many more laws and principles will be laid bare when men come to realize that all living things are of one blood, than are to be discerned through the cold and unsympathetic gaze of old-fashioned science. Gibson's habit, moreover, was not a "humanizing" of animal and plant life, in the sense of trying to force our life upon theirs, attributing human thoughts and aims and feelings to the lower creation. It was rather an effort to link their

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life to ours, by insight, sympathy, and study. He simply made men feel the kinship of all living things. In that he was fully in the spirit of the most advanced science. He believed thoroughly in the truth contained in a sentence which he quoted from "the rapt philosopher of Walden": "Man cannot afford to be a naturalist and look at nature directly. He must look through and beyond her. To look at her is as fatal as to look at the head of Medusa. It turns the man of science to stone."

How thoroughly he grasped the spirit of the "new botany" which traces the links between the animal and insect worlds one passage will suffice to show.

"What startling disclosures are revealed to the inward eye within the hearts of all these strange orchidaceous flowers! Blossoms whose functions, through long eras of adaptation, have gradually shaped themselves to the forms of certain chosen insect sponsors; blossoms whose chalices are literally fashioned to bees or butterflies; blossoms whose slender, prolonged nectaries invite and reward the murmuring sphinx-moth alone, the floral throat closely embracing his head while it attaches its pollen masses to the bulging eyes, or perchance to the capillary tongue! And thus in endless modifications, evidences all of the same deep vital purpose.

"Let us then content ourselves no longer with being mere 'botanists'—historians of structural facts.

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The flowers are not mere comely or curious vegetable creations, with colors, odors, petals, stamens, and innumerable technical attributes. The wonted insight alike of scientist, philosopher, theologian, and dreamer is now repudiated in the new revelation. Beauty is not 'its own excuse for being,' nor was fragrance ever 'wasted on the desert air.' The seer has at last heard and interpreted the voice in the wilderness. The flower is no longer a simple passive victim in the busy bee's sweet pillage, but rather a conscious being, with hopes, aspirations, and companionships. The insect is its counterpart. Its fragrance is but a perfumed whisper of welcome, its color is as the wooing blush and rosy lip, its portals are decked for his coming, and its sweet hospitalities humored to his tarrying; and as it finally speeds its parting affinity rests content that its life's consummation has been fulfilled."

How closely he observed and how much he read "between the lines" appears in his account of his introduction to the study of entomology, the first awakening of his real interest in what became the object of a consuming passion.

"It was a day in early June, and nature was bursting with exuberance. The very earth was teeming with awakening germs—here an acorn, with its biformed hungry germ—parody on the dual mission of mortal life—one seeking earth, the other heaven; here

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"The Bobolink at Home"

("Strolls by Starlight")

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an odd little elf of maple, with his winged cap still clinging as he danced upon his slender stem; while numerous nameless green things clove the sod and matted leaves, and slender coils of ferns unrolled in eager grasp from their woolly winter nest.

"But dear to my heart as were these familiar tokens, how quickly were they all forgotten in my contemplation simply of a little stone that lay upon a patch of mold directly at my elbow, and my wandering eyes were riveted upon it, for it seemed as though in the universal quickening even this also had taken life.

"I can see it this moment. It moves again, and yet again, until now, with a final effort, it is lifted from its setting and rolled away, while in its place there protrudes from the ground a chrysalis risen from its sepulcher. Filled with wonder, I sit and watch as though in a dream, awaiting the revelation from this mysterious earthly messenger, when suddenly the encasement swells and breaks, the cerements are burst, and the strange shape gives birth to the form of a beautiful moth — a tender, trembling thing, which emerges from the empty shell and creeps quivering upon an overhanging spray.

"Now followed that beautiful and wonderous unfolding of the winged life—the softly-falling crumpled folds, the quivering pulsations of the new-born wings eager for their flight, until at length their glory

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shone in purity and perfection—a trial flutter, and the perfect being took wing and flew away!

"Thus did I become a votary to that science known as 'entomology.' What wonder, then, that it should yield to me in after life a winged significance, a spirit of unrest that bursts the shell of mere terminology, and enjoys a realm of resource not found in books, except, indeed, between the lines? For the entomology which I would seek is not yet written, and it is beyond my conception that any one among its votaries could witness unmoved by its deeper impress a spectacle such as this, or could find through the retina of science alone an ample insight."

It is a curious feature of his experience that even the birds and the beasts seemed to feel this sympathy of his, and permitted him to take such liberties with them as they seldom grant. So many stories of his power and its exercise have gone out, that it seems best to let him give his own version of it. The first instances are narrated in a letter written from the Thorn Mountain House, Jackson, New Hampshire, in September, 1883:

"Among other things that Mrs. Farr has confided to a few of her newly made friends at the Intervale, is my remarkable power over animals and birds, by which I take them in my hand alive in the woods, and tame them. But while this idea of hers originally started in a joke, I am gradually becoming con-

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vinced that I *have* the power she attributes to me, but fail to develop or utilize it. On the very day she first spread the rumor, I walked with herself and husband in Cathedral Woods. He espied a squirrel jumping along the pine needles with a cone in his mouth. I suddenly conceived the notion to capture him. I followed him for a few paces and finally succeeded in placing my hand over him and catching him, holding him in my hand for several minutes afterward, as my fingers still bear witness from the network of scratches they exhibit. On the following day I almost caught a chick-a-dee, and to cap the climax, of all things, to-day, after dinner, while sitting on the porch I observed what I supposed to be a day-sphinx hovering over a bed of flowers across the lawn. I approached and soon discovered it to be a humming-bird, and was about to turn back when the thought suggested itself to try and catch the little fellow. Accordingly I approached and watched him closely for a moment or two, drawing nearer and nearer the while. He soon seemed to get accustomed to my presence and came to sip the honey from some verbenas at my feet. I lowered my hand slowly, and closed it about his tiny body with perfect ease and he seemed to make no effort to release himself. I took him to my room and closing the windows gave him wing. I played with him for nearly an hour and he at length became so tame that he would alight

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upon my finger and jump from one finger to another placed in front of him, and even preen his feathers. He was a dear little creature and I almost wanted to keep him. He would alight upon the window shutter, and when I held my finger an inch or so in front of him he would jump on it and fluff out his feathers. I could pick him up at any moment and lay him on his back in my hand, where he would remain perfectly quiet, with his bright black eyes moving all about as alive as could be. At length I concluded to give him his freedom, but in order first to allow the guests of the house an opportunity to see my diminutive captive, I tied a long piece of cotton twine loosely in one knot about one of his tiny feet and thus exhibited him. The twine was so heavy that it eased his occasional flight and the softness of it prevented injury to his foot. When all had seen him I cut the string close to his leg and away he went like the wind, no doubt taking his first opportunity to pick off the loose fold of string still dangling to his leg. Once before I almost picked a humming-bird from a flower, and I believe I can do it again and again with a few trials. So I feel less than ever like disabusing the mind of Mrs. Farr of what at first seemed so incredible and improbable."

In the chapter on "Woodnotes" in "Happy Hunting Grounds" Gibson describes the incident which was mentioned by Dr. Raymond at his funeral. He

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was once standing in line with many others at the polls in a voting-place in Brooklyn, when a dove flew down and into the room, and came straight to him, alighting upon his shoulder. No one in the place knew anything about the bird, or had ever seen it before. No one could see why it should have chosen him over all others in the group of voters. Possibly Mr. Gibson's own explanation will have to answer. In his note of the incident he says, "I remarked to the bystanders, 'That bird knows a good Republican when he sees one.'"

Others also recall the incident of Dr. Abbott's visit to Washington, when Mr. Gibson pointed out a bird in a near-by tree and began to describe its peculiar markings. Soon he rose impulsively, went up to the tree, reached out for the bird, and took the little creature in his hand, without its appearing in the least alarmed or hurt. Then, when he had finished his description and thus illustrated it from life, he replaced his specimen in the tree, whence it flew away. He certainly seemed to have that about him which made even the birds feel that he loved them and meant them no harm.

His crowning work as a naturalist was done in the lectures upon the cross-fertilization of plants which fascinated so many audiences with the novel story of one of nature's most amazing manifestations of adaptation and of resource. For years he had been

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a careful student of Sprengel, Darwin, and Müller, whose experiments and studies he supplemented with careful observations of his own, upon the relations of plant- and insect-life. He accumulated a mass of studies and of notes. He brooded over this theme for years. And at last, driven to utterance, he prepared himself, as few men are able to, for a series of lectures, illustrated with charts of his own invention and his own making. The machinery of these lectures was a superb test of his triple powers as naturalist, as artist, as writer. They were based on a solid and accurate knowledge of natural history. They were illustrated by a master hand in mechanical technique, reinforced by an artist's skill in drawing and in color. They were set forth in a text which was clear, vivacious, and forceful. They constituted one of the most delightful and popular courses ever given before the American public. His own account of the origin of these lectures is most interesting. He had been in the habit of giving informal talks and lectures upon natural history in his summer home at Washington, illustrating them by rapid sketches on the blackboard. "When I came," he said, "to touch upon the topic of inter-association and inter-communion of insects and flowers, especially the mechanism of flowers, their movements and forms, I found that I was handicapped, as many other scientists had been, by the difficulty of expressing motion by fixed

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drawings and descriptions. It occurred to me to make a drawing of the sage-blossom with its tilted stamen fastened on separately to show the movement. This I did. It proved to be a revelation to myself and I made several other sectional charts of flowers and of insects that same summer. They served to demonstrate ocularly and simply, without the slightest effort on the part of my audience, what had heretofore been presented only in difficult technical descriptions. There really seemed to be a new field for work, and I accepted the indications and concentrated my thought upon the theme." A writer who had been an attendant at these lectures gives this description of them:

"The lecture describes some general principles about a group of flowers and their associated insect-visitors, and while the listener is endeavoring to induce his imagination to form some picture of the process, Mr. Gibson steps to a screen, hangs up and unfolds a beautifully executed sketch of the flower, and gives an ocular demonstration of the thing he has just described. One sees the bee crawl into the sage-blossom, tilt the pivoted stamens, and come out with the pollen upon his back, which burden he is now ready to carry to another blossom, upon whose pistil he partly unloads it. The same busy bee creeps into the pogonia and straightway two powdery anthers are clasped to his side, leaving their visible deposit of

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yellow dust. The orchids are made to clap sticking-plasters upon their visitors, or to hurl bombshells of pollen on their heads. There is no room for failure to understand. The whole process is demonstrated before the sight, by a mechanism which works to a charm, a visible and artistic unfolding of the most subtle operations of the plant and insect world."

An instant and complete success awaited this new venture. Everywhere there was a demand for the lectures, and they were received with a popular interest rather surprising when one considers how thoroughly scientific they were. The farmers of his own neighborhood; the members of sedate city clubs; school-children and society-women,—all classes and types of people with any appetite for knowledge, or any sense of the wonderful in nature, joined in the applause which greeted Gibson's appearance as a lecturer upon natural history. He repeated upon the platform the success he had won as a writer and an artist. He established his reputation as a master in scientific demonstration. It was truly said of him that the field he entered in these lectures "had not since the days of Agassiz been cultivated with such success as by Mr. Gibson." As a popular teacher of scientific fact no man in this country since Agassiz gained such a hold or did such a work as he. There is no doubt that if he had lived he would have won an international renown in this field as well as that of art.

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The Writing Desk
Brooklyn Studio

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CHAPTER VI

THE ACCIDENT OF AUTHORSHIP

IT was written deep in the constitution of his spirit that William Hamilton Gibson was to be a naturalist and an artist. By endowment and by desire he was marked for that career which made him at once the observer of nature and her illustrator by pencil and by brush. But the predestination does not seem so clear in the case of his authorship. It does not appear to have been so plainly provided in his nature that he was called to be a writer of books. Here the prophecy could not have been so surely made—beforehand. Gibson himself used to declare that he drifted into authorship ; that his writing was not premeditated but accidental. He was not impelled to this mode of expression as he was to his drawing and his painting and his lecturing. He described to a friend the manner in which he began to write, and his first attempt at such work as afterward gave him standing as an author:

"The way in which I drifted into literary work was quite natural, and in a way this work became imperative if I was to gain a livelihood. I had my sketch-book and portfolio full of drawings from nature. As

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a beginner I could not illustrate, I could only show these specimens, which would not sell alone by themselves. But there were certain things in natural history which my sketches did illustrate. This fact suggested to me the possibility of writing up matter to go with my sketches. In this way I found entrance into the illustrated publications, and eventually secured a good hold for myself. But I had never yet had the remotest idea of becoming a writer. The way in which I happened to take up more serious writing was through a suggestion of Mr. Henry M. Alden, the editor of Harper's Magazine. I returned one summer from a vacation spent in Washington, Connecticut, and was describing to him my school-life, telling him little episodes which had been recalled by my visit to Mr. Gunn. Mr. Alden seemed interested, and when I was done, said to me, 'I want you to write that out for the magazine.' This suggestion led to an article called 'Snug Hamlet,' which to my surprise and gratification was received when it appeared, with a good deal of favor. Then Mr. Alden suggested that I prepare an article to go with it, which, as this had to do with summer, should treat of winter. This, too, was written, 'The Winter Idyl.' Then followed others upon spring and autumn. With these four sketches I had enough for a book; and 'Pastoral Days' was the result, which proved a great success."

Such was his introduction to literature. He always

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regarded it as a pendant to his other work, something to introduce his sketches, to help along his art. He never became confused by his various aptitudes, nor lost sight of his great passion and purpose. He kept the essential spirit of his life and work quite clear of any entanglement with what was accidental. He had never expected, never intended to be a writer ; and his success at literary work was a surprise to him, as it was to his friends. They apparently had never thought of him as a possible author, and scarcely knew how to take his achievement.

When the press-notices of "Pastoral Days" began to come in, they were almost unanimous in according to the newly fledged author unstinted praise for the literary portion of his work. The chorus of appreciation is almost unbroken ; and one feels, through all the perfunctory graciousness of the reviewers, so hard-pressed at Christmas-tide, a note of sincerity and real pleasure in the new writer's production. When one considers that Gibson the writer was an unknown aspirant for favor, and that he was competing with Gibson the artist, the reigning favorite among American illustrators, the success of his literary venture is really amazing. Repeatedly the book is called "a prose-poem." "Although there be no poetry in it, the book in its totality is a most exquisite poem." "There is a smooth and tender rhythmic flow in the phrasing, an affluence of diction which constitute one of the

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indispensable elements of poetry, and almost entitle the sketches to be named among the poems of the language." One of the most competent critics, in a journal of the first rank, wrote of his prose :

"William Blake is the most noted poet-artist of this century, but not in his work is to be found such unity and harmony between what he does as pictorial and literary artist, as exists in 'Pastoral Days.' We have used the words poet-artist advisedly in connection with Mr. Gibson. He is above all a poet-artist. Not a poet alone, nor an artist alone, but the two together, a combination as rare as it is charming."

Even the "Evening Post" calls them "Mr. Gibson's four sympathetic, appreciative, poetically interpretative essays upon the seasons." And it puts the question to its readers, "Need we say that this author-artist is a poet although he writes in prose, or that his text and his pictures are essentially a poem of the New England year?" But two of his reviewers—one in the "Utica Morning Herald," and another in the "Boston Literary World"—actually cite the same passage in his prose which "reads with the movement and rhythm of blank verse." The latter of these says :

"Mr. Gibson writes with a curious study of rhythmic effect ; his whole book, in fact, might easily have been converted into blank verse,—as witness this extract from pp. 127–8, which, to help the illusion, we print in that form :

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Silently like thoughts that come and go,
The snowflakes fall each one a gem,
The whitened air conceals all earthly trace,
And leaves to memory the space to fill.
I look upon a blank whereon my fancy paints,
As could no hand of mine, the pictures and the poems of a boyhood life:
And even as the undertone of a painting, be it warm or cool,
Shall modify or change the color laid upon it,
So this cold and frosty background, through the window,
Transfigures all my thoughts, and forms them into winter memories, legion like the snow.
Oh, that I could translate for other eyes, the winter idyl painted there!
I see a living past!

"All this, understand, and the rest of a hundred and fifty and more pages like it, is sober prose; but it makes one think of eighteenth-century poetry like Graham's, which is very good descriptive poetry by the way."

Says one enthusiastic critic, speaking first of the make-up of the volume:

"It is almost too beautiful to read; but with a determination to see what lay beyond this vision of the beautiful, we commenced to read, and found the author to be a high-priest of nature. We were led along by the charming simplicity of the writer, till at last, in midsummer we seemed to be surrounded by scenes so familiar that we almost suspected that by some strange mishap the author had misspelled the

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name of the school of early days, and had written 'Snuggery' for 'Gunnery.' How is this? . . .

"The letter-press of such books is usually a make-weight for the illustrations; but in this case it is hard to decide which of the two merits the palm."

Another speaks of the text of the book, saying:

"Here quite as strikingly as in the designs for illustration is shown that loving familiarity with all the infinite variations in nature's moods and works. Without the pictures altogether, these sketches would compel admiration as very notable specimens of word-painting."

It will be news to many of his admirers to know that Gibson's first book was published in 1876. It was entitled, "The Complete American Trapper," and was published by James Miller, of New York. The book was republished in 1878 by Bradley & Co., and again in 1880 by Harper Brothers under the title, "Camp-Life in the Woods; and the Tricks of Trapping and Trap-Making." It was written out of the joyous and ample memories of his youth, supplemented by his reading and intercourse with hunters and woodsmen. He refers in the preface to his own boyish days, and to "one autumn in particular which shines out above all the rest; and that was when his traps were first set, and were the chief source of his amusement. The adventurous excitement which sped him on in those daily tramps through the woods, and the

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A Winter Hunt

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buoyant, exhilarating effect of the exercise, can be realized only by those who have had the same experience." This little book, which still appeals to the juvenile mind,—a new edition was put out as lately as 1899,—has had a singular charm, not only for boys, but for those grown men who never quite lose the heart of boyhood. Gibson himself brought it to the notice of Charles A. Dana, of the "New York Sun," and handed him a copy to read. The result of that chance courtesy was not a perfunctory review by a subordinate of the staff. The "chief" himself read it and wrote an enthusiastic notice of over two columns' length. The young author—he was only twenty-six—went to Mr. Beecher for a notice, at the time he first changed publishers. He wrote this account of the call to his mother:

"NEW YORK, *July 22, 78.*

"DEAR MOTHER :—

"I sent you the day I wrote this letter, four papers and a magazine. The magazine is quite well printed and the bird article has created a regular 'sensation.' I hear of it on all sides, hear people talking about it on the ferry-boats and in restaurants, and have received many enthusiastic congratulations. The press (those which have yet spoken) are appreciative, as you see, and there will be doubtless many more equally commendatory notices. It is a pleasure unspeakable.

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"I have got a little bit of news which I think will please you. You remember I told you that I thought of getting a line from Mr. Beecher on my book to be used on a circular. Well, I called upon him and took my bird proofs with me. He was delighted, even excited, over them, and manifested the keenest interest in all pertaining to them, particularly as regarded Mr. Parsons. I told him all about the thing and he ended up by saying 'Well, Will, your progress is simply stupendous. I'm proud of you.' I then told him about the change in my book, and he was again delighted at the mention of Mr. Bradley's name. He said that I might travel the world over and would not find a nobler man than Bradley, and the business push of the firm was second to no other in this or any other country—that it was a 'feather in my cap' to secure such men as my publishers. I broached the subject of the 'opinion' from him, asking him if he could conscientiously give me about 'ten words.' He turned about after a minute's thought, and penned two pages of note paper, and such a two pages! The following is a copy :

"'Why was I born so early? Why did not the messenger angel sent with me defer his visit to earth until the 'Complete American Trapper' had been published? I even mourn to think of what I was deprived of in my youth. I can't imagine a country boy, a real American boy, who would not go without

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his dinner for months if in this way only he could obtain this wonderful boy's book! And that parent is hard-hearted, and may even be in dread of I Timothy 5; 8, who will not buy this book for his boys; and for that matter, a man is a boy until he is fifty years old. I am all the more interested in the book because Mr. Gibson is one of my boys, brought up under my eyes in old Plymouth, and by good hard work has deserved success.

"'HENRY WARD BEECHER.'

"On the morning after receiving the above I found a letter from Bradley & Co., in which they remarked that they hoped I would succeed in getting a word from Mr. Beecher. I sent the notice to them and would like you to see the letter I got from them in acknowledgment."

Dr. J. G. Holland was another friend to whom he looked for a word of approval. He was not quite so sure of his own mind, and wrote in a much more guarded way. His humane heart was a little troubled about the effect of the book. In truth, Gibson himself became, in later years, quite uneasy about it. His own sympathy with animals increased, and his love for them, as little brothers and sisters of the wood; and he grew more and more averse to whatever gave them pain. But he rested in the intent of his book as he describes it explicitly in the preface: "If the poor

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victims are to serve no use after their capture, either as food, or in the furnishing of their plumage or skins for useful purposes, the sport becomes heartless cruelty, and we do not wish to be understood as encouraging it under any circumstances." He would probably have strengthened that utterance at a later day, and possibly have written another preface. Dr. Holland's letter runs thus:

"NEW YORK, *Nov. 7, 1878.*

"DEAR MR. GIBSON:

"I have been looking over your book with an interest mingled of dread and delight. It is so easy to pervert all these traps of yours into instruments of cruelty that the book seems almost a dangerous one. But, after all, what good thing is there that is not liable to be perverted? The capture of animals for food is entirely legitimate. The capture of the fur-bearing animals is quite as proper, while the destruction of those that are dangerous to the life of men and domestic animals cannot be objected to on any ground.

"These purposes cover your field, or nearly cover it, and you certainly have met them with a book which, so far as I know, has no equal. It is a good book to put in the hands of every boy who is not so cruel as to deserve to be caught in a trap himself.

"Yours truly,

"J. G. HOLLAND."

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It should not be supposed that Gibson was so confident of himself and his own resources that he disdained the work and experience and knowledge of others. He was a good reader and a hard student. The pages of his books are crowded with passages out of his favorite poets, and his note-books show the careful husbanding of the fruits of his reading on all the themes nearest to his heart. Wordsworth, Shelley, Keats, and Browning, in all that they have seen and sung of nature, were his authorities often cited, and annotated, and winnowed into his note-books. The New England poets he knew and loved, and shared all their honest preference for those home products which so many count homely and call commonplace because they happen to be common. Thoreau he knew thoroughly and loved as a master in the great profession of nature-study; and his references to him are always those of a modest disciple, his bearing and attitude that of deference and respect. Hawthorne, too, was one whose subtle and spiritual genius found a sympathetic and ready interpreter in his own imagination. Darwin he knew, and all his works which bore upon cross-fertilization had mastered. When he gave the wonderful talks on flowers and their insect allies to the townspeople and farmers of Washington, an old "native" came to him, and in the dialect of old New England said: "Mr. Gibson, do you mean to tell me thet thet 's whut Darwin 's been

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tellin' 'baout?" "Yes," was the reply, "that is one of the things he has been talking about." "Wal," was the rejoinder, "I never took no stock in Darwin afore, but I sh'll think a heap on him naow." Indeed, there was, in all his lectures, the frankest acknowledgment of his indebtedness—of the common debt of all of us—to those pioneers in this fallow field of knowledge. He stinted no praise, no honor to their names, and used their work with hearty acknowledgment. He knew Sprengel, Darwin, Müller, well and, following their lead into the enchanted and enchanting country of new knowledge, soon made himself a student at first hand of the things he had been taught by these great masters.

Gibson was by no means an "easy" writer. His page, as it stands, revised and corrected, hardly gives a sign of the pains taken to bring it into smooth and fluent shape. It seems to be a natural, spontaneous running-on of a mind as sure of its expressions as it is of its impressions. But the effect was purchased only by the hardest and most conscientious labor. His "first drafts" show all the experiments he made in words, phrases, expressions, and construction. Many times the text is hardly legible, it is so crossed, recrossed, cut, interlined, and rewritten altogether. If Sheridan's judgment is to be accepted, that "easy writing 's curst hard reading," Gibson comes honestly by his pleasing style. The patient work of the author

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has smoothed the way for the reader. He had both the qualifications which Pope declares constitute the secret of good writing,—"to know thoroughly what one writes about, and not to be affected." And to these he added a third; he took pains.

In a letter written to Mr. Gunn in 1880, Gibson pours out his heart, as he always did to his old teacher, and reveals incidentally the spirit in which he took his literary work, as well as the honest and conscientious purpose behind it all.

"140 Nassau St., N. Y.
"*June 7/80.*

"Dear Mr. Gunn:

"If you only knew how much happiness your letters always give me you would never feel it necessary to accompany them with any apology whose need exists only in your imagination. There are a hundred reasons why I value a letter from you more than that of any other friend in the world, even though it should be all that you seem to think, in 'tameness.' I like your so-called tame letters. I don't care how you write, so long as you write when you feel like it. Your appreciation of my 'Springtime' gratifies me more than all the 'press' encomiums put together, for you combine all the qualifications for the most perfect criticism, both as regards the question of truthfulness and style. I appreciate your praise, more than I can tell, albeit I may inwardly feel that it is not

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deserved. When I write on the subject of nature, there seems to be an unseen impulse that guides my hand and fairly overwhelms me with memories. It is difficult for me to select from the enormous mass of reminiscences and vivid pictures that crowd upon me. Dates and figures I cannot remember, but verily it does seem that every bit of animate or inanimate nature, whether in the form of insect or of flower, whether subtle tint of bark or lichen, crumpled leaf or dried and broken twig among the herbage, every one comes up before me as though by magic spell, and I thank my happy life at the Gunnery for the inspiration that led to the thoughtful study of the infinite beauties of nature. How thankful I am that they are infinite, that so long as I live I shall always find fresh food for contemplation. I am now in my element and as happy a man as walks the earth at this moment. My future is without a sign of disappointment, and so long as I keep convinced of a present lack of fulfilment of the powers within me, so long am I sure of progress and happiness as far as my work is concerned. My work is so full of faults to me, that I am amazed that others do not see them. So long as I improve I am satisfied and I am greatly gratified that you consider my latest an improvement on the former efforts.

"I have just finished a set of drawings for an article to complete the series. It is an 'Autumn Rev-

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erie,' to appear in October. The drawings are better I think than 'Springtime.' The article is yet unborn but exists in chaos in my brain, an immense tangle in which at present it seems impossible to find the loose end. But I shall get hold of it in a few days and it will reel off all right I suppose. This literary work was a strange result of circumstances. I can thank the Gunnery for this also, for it was only after narrating my happy experience at Washington that I was urged to write it up. The article was a success and of course another followed and another, each apparently an improvement, until now I find my literary work at a premium. . . .

"When it comes to extended landscapes I would rather paint them on larger surfaces than a few inches. Don't count too much on my 'climbing.' I have not written much yet. You may yet have the chance, but not if I know it. I have been utterly amazed at the ignorance shown by the people (who are supposed to be writing from the 'inspiration of Nature') both in their anachronisms and in their wild ideas about our fauna. Thus in September 'Harper's' will appear five large drawings by me illustrating a poem written by some fellow who you would imagine was fresh from England with his skylarks and fieldfares, etc. I called the attention of the editor to it, but I suppose it will go in all the same. My portfolios are full of sketches and studies and notes thereon as to dates, etc. In

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writing haphazard I fall into many errors, but I let no manuscript leave my hands carelessly prepared. I have been criticised on my 'coltsfoot,' some thinking only *Tussilago Farfara,* whereas I used the 'common' name in our section for the *Asarum Canadense.* So also with my partridge, I knew better; but should I have alluded to a 'ruffed grouse' in Sandy Hook, they would have thought I was talking Latin!"

There is an interesting letter, much prized by Gibson, in which his old friend gave him such unstinted praise as seldom comes from so exacting a critic in the field in which the young man was at work. Mr. Gunn wrote him:

"GUNNERY, WASHINGTON, CONN.
"Sunday, June 6th, 11 P.M.

"MY DEAR WILLIE:

"I have thought of you 7 times every day, ever since the publication of your beautiful Idyll of Spring. You expected me to write; but I cannot do that even now. Everything that I think and much more everything that I think on paper, seems so flat and unworthy to be written. Other men seem content to write and say little, or little to the purpose. The fact is, Willie, there are few men who know the spring. They know a little about it, a few flowers, a few birds, a few showers, a few facts and phenomena—but I don't know any artists, poets, or other men but you and John Burroughs that know it all. I don't see how or when you

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Springtime
From a Painting

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learned it all. I have never met a man that knew so much of the real life of Nature as I know myself—and how did you come to see and hear it all? I remember it now that you recall it to me—I even thought one night in my bed, that I had detected a slip in your chronology. I thought you had delayed the flower which you euphoniously denominate the 'Swamp Cabbage' till too late a day. I looked in the morning in the Magazine and there it was promptly ready in the wild days of March. I venture to say that no poet has before been so true to nature as you have been. I thought no man except John Burroughs had seen or heard so much in the woods as I am wont to see; but lo! one of my own boys has seen with keener eyes, has heard with more acute ears, and has had genius and taste to tell it all in words, and to paint it all with a magic brush. Other men don't know which most to admire in you, the artist or the naturalist. Well I don't; but who before has described spring without a blunder? They draw a nightingale where I heard a whippoorwill, or they set Venus to glow in the east on a summer evening. I have not detected a slip. And what an old fool I was to keep pencils away from you, when you were born with a whole magazine of them. I cannot write. I ought not to have begun. I think 'Spring' by far the richer article of the two—full of the nicest touches both with pencil and with pen—and you are a dear good fellow, and so is your

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wife. God bless you both. Go and see Abbie at 36 Garden Place.

"Yours,

"F. W. GUNN."

To this Gibson made speedy answer, giving full absolution and much more :

"Do not chide yourself for keeping the pencils from me, for it is not true. You never did—you tried, but gave it up. When you were wont to say every few minutes in school 'Gibson, what are you doing?' I used to answer, withdrawing my eyes from the window 'Nothing, sir.' You never dreamed of the true amount of thinking that was going on within my cranium. Lazy as I seemed to be, I was never idle in my mind and I can see now the flickering light and shade among the leaves of the old school-house maples—see the squirming caterpillar dangling from his silken thread, swinging in the summer breeze.

"The white-faced wasp upon the window-sill is as distinct to me now as if he crawled upon this paper. These and a thousand more I recall, and even the first glimpse of the first day of my happy life at Washington comes up before me with a freshness in decided contrast to the memories of the later years. You well remember 'Amy's Grotto' in the pasture lot. You took me to see it and my eyes were wide open also in those early days. Little thing, as it was,

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it has impressed itself upon my memory as indelibly as anything in my entire life? I recall its every sprig of green and hear the tuneful drops in the limpid pool.

"Where then did I learn it all, except from your own dear self in the happiest season of my life? You it was who turned my thoughts towards nature, and inspired the desire in me to follow up the study. If I have lived to see the day when you are 'proud of me' or when I can in any way contribute to your pleasure as a meagre return for the many years of happiness you have given me, I have not lived in vain, for this very desire has been a factor in the ends and aims of my ambition.

"Whew! Talk of letters! Don't you ever say another word about your letters. A page of your handwriting acts like a talisman that conjures up a host of reminiscences, and sets my pen and thoughts going like a saw mill; and here it is six o'clock, and my wife told me to be home by that time, as we are both going to call upon Mrs. Gunn this evening by appointment. Gracious! and only to think that I have n't got a moment to spare to dot my i's and cross my t's, nor send it to the binders. I hope you will be able to make it all out. I'll page it for you anyhow.

"Good bye, with much love from

"Your old boy

"Alias Willie." "W. Hamilton Gibson.

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The chief sources of the interest of his literary work appear in those lines. He had something to say; and he said it in his own way. There are no better recipes than those for concocting a lasting success in literature.

His style was, like all good style, the outcome of his spirit. He had a marvelous power of telling because he had such exceptional power of seeing. In the passage describing the night stroll in the woods, he fills the mind with the mystery of the outward scene, and makes it seem, without any sense of undue artifice, just the setting for the mysterious transaction which ensues between the primrose and the moth.

"Our misty primrose dell is fast lighting its pale lamps in the twilight. One by one they flash out in the gloom as if obedient to the hovering touch of some Ariel unseen—or is it the bright response to the firefly's flitting torch? The sun has long sunk beneath the hill. And now, when the impenetrable dusk has deepened round about, involving all, where but a moment since all was visible, this shadowy dell has forgotten the sunset, and knows a twilight all its own, independent of the fading glow of the sky. It was a sleepy nook by day, where it is now all life and vigilance; it was dark and still at noon, where it is now bright and murmurous. The 'delicious secret' is now whispered abroad, and where in all the mystic alchemy of odors or attars shall you find such a

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witching fragrance as this which is here borne on the diaphanous tide of the jealous gliding mist, and fills the air with its sweet enchantment—the stilly night's own spirit guised in perfume? Yonder bright cluster, deep within the recess of the alders, how it glows! fanned by numerous feathery wings, it glimmers in the dark like a phosphorescent aureole — verily as though some merry will-o'-the-wisp, tired of his dancing, had perched him there, while other luminous spires rise above the mist, or here and there hover in lambent banks beyond, or, like those throbbing fires beneath the ocean surge, illume the fog with half-smothered halo. This lustrous tuft at our elbow! Let us turn our lantern upon it. Its nightly whorl of lamps is already lit, save one or two that have escaped our fairy in his rounds, but not for long, for the green veil of this sunset bud is now rent from base to tip. The confined folded petals are pressing hard for their release. In a moment more, with an audible impulse, the green apex bursts asunder, and the four freed sepals slowly reflex against the hollow tube of the flower, while the lustrous corolla shakes out its folds, saluting the air with its virgin breath.

"The slender stamens now explore the gloom, and hang their festoons of webby pollen across their tips. None too soon, for even now a silvery moth circles about the blossom, and settles among the out-stretched filaments, sipping the nectar in tremulous

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content. But he carries a precious token as he hies away, a golden necklace, perhaps, and with it a message to yonder blossom among the alders, and thus until the dawn, his rounds directed with a deep design of which he is an innocent instrument, but which insures a perpetual paradise of primroses for future sippers like himself."

The reader feels the pure delight he takes in the beauty of bird- and flower- forms; and there is no stinting of phrases in his determination to convey some sense of them to those who, "having eyes, see not." He is as accurate as Audubon and as poetic as Lowell in his description of the rose-breasted grosbeak and his rich song.

"Hark, from the apple-tree in the field below, that note so full and ripe and mellow! 'A robin,' say you? No; nor an oriole. There is a distinct individuality in that song, which, while suggesting both these birds, still differentiates it in many respects as the superior to either, as though from a fuller throat, a more ample vocal source. It is one of the rarest, choicest voices among all our feathered songsters, in *timbre* and volume surpassing the thrush, and in these qualities unequaled, I think, by any of our birds. Listen to the overflowing measure of its melody! How comparatively few the notes, and yet how telling!—no single tone lost, no superficial intricacies. Sensuous, and suffused with color, it is like a rich, pulpy,

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luscious, pink-cheeked tropic fruit rendered into sound. Such would seem the irresistible figure as I listen with closed eyes to the swelling notes—a figure entirely independent of, though certainly sustained in, the ornithological form pictured in the song, sitting quietly on an upper twig, with full plump breast as carmine-cheeked as the autumn apples now promised in the swelling blossom calyxes among which it so quietly nestles. I can see the jetty head, and quills splashed with silvery white, and the intervals of song seem spanned with rosy light as pure as the prism released from those upraised wings as the singer preens his plumage with ivory bill. This is the rose-breasted grosbeak, with his overflowing cup, his pastoral cornucopia, his musical horn of plenty."

There is something about the description of the piping of the frogs in the distant marsh which brings tears to the eye of him who reads it with a hundred boyhood memories to make it real. This is the passage which excited the admiration of the critic in the "Saturday Review," and led him to say: "People must be strangely constituted who do not enjoy such pages as Mr. Gibson has presented to us here. It is not merely that he writes well, though he possesses a style that is full of felicities, but the subject itself is irresistibly fascinating."

"A plaintive piping trill now breaks the impressive stillness. Again and again I hear the little lonely voice

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vibrating through the low-lying mist. It is only a little frog in some far-off marsh ; but what a sweet sense of sadness is awakened by that lowly melody! How its weird minor key, with its magic touch, unlocks the treasures of the heart. Only the peeping of a frog; but where in all the varied voices of the night, where, even among the great chorus of nature's sweetest music, is there another song so lulling in its dreamy melody, so full of that emotive charm which quickens the human heart? How often in the vague spring twilight have I yielded to the strange, fascinating melancholy awakened by the frog's low murmur at the water's edge! How many times have I lingered near some swampy roadside bog, and let these little wizards weave their mystic spell about my willing senses, while the very air seemed to quiver in the fulness of their song! I remember the tangle of tall and withered rushes, through whose mysterious depths the eye in vain would strive to penetrate at the sound of some faint splash or ripple, or perhaps at the quaint, high-keyed note of some little isolated hermit, piping in his somber solitude. I recall the first glimpse of the rising moon, as its great golden face peered out at me from over the distant hill, enclosing half the summit against its broad and luminous surface. Slowly and steadily it seemed to steal into view, until, risen in all its fulness, I caught its image in the trembling ripples at the edge of the soggy pool, where

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Lake Waramaug
From a Painting

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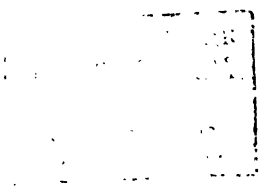

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the palpitating water responded to the frog's low, tremulous monotone."

He loves a swamp, and is repeatedly telling of its charm, which he celebrates in a brief paragraph that swings through the whole cycle of the natural year, and finds a new theme to celebrate for every month.

"I know of no other place in which the progress of the year is so readily traced as in these swampy fallow lands. They are a living calendar, not merely of the seasons alone, but of every month successively; and its record is almost unmistakably disclosed. It is whispered in the fragrant breath of flowers, and of the aromatic herbage you crush beneath your feet. It floats about on filmy wings of dragon-fly and butterfly, or glistens in the air on silky seeds. It skips upon the surface of the water, or swims among the weeds beneath; and is noised about in myriads of telltale songs among the reeds and sedges. The swallows and the starlings proclaim it in their flight, and the very absence of these living features is as eloquent as life itself. Even in the simple story of the leaf, the bud, the blossom, and the downy seed, it is told as plainly as though written in prosaic words and strewn among the herbage.

"In the early, blustering days of March, there is a stir beneath the thawing ground, and the swamp cabbage-root sends up a well protected scout to explore among the bogs; but so dismal are the tidings

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which he brings, that for weeks no other venturing sprout dares lift its head. He braves alone the stormy month—the solitary sign of spring, save, perhaps, the lengthening of the alder catkins that loosen in the wind. April woos the yellow cowslips into bloom along the water's edge, and the golden willow twigs shake out their perfumed tassels. In May the prickly carex blossoms among the tussocks, and the calamus buds burst forth among their flat, green blades. June is heralded on right and left by the unfurling of blue-flags, and the eyebright blue winks and blinks as it awakens in the dazzling July sun.

"Then follows brimful August, with the summer's consummation of luxuriance and bloom ; with flowers in dense profusion in bouquets of iron-weed and thoroughworts, of cardinal flowers and fragrant clethra, with their host of blossoming companions. The milkweed pods fray out their early floss upon September breezes, and the blue petals of the gentian first unfold their fringes. October overwhelms us with the friendly tokens of bur-marigolds and bidens ; while its thickets of black-alder lose their autumn verdure, and leave November with a "burning bush" of scarlet berries hitherto half-hidden in the leafage. Now, too, the copses of witch-hazel bedeck themselves, and are yellow with their tiny ribbons. December's name is written in wreaths of snow upon the withered stalks of slender weeds and rushes, which soon lie bent and

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broken in the lap of January, crushed beneath their winter weight. And in the fulfilment of the cycle, February sees the swelling buds of willow, with their restless pussies eager for the spring, half creeping from their winter cells."

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CHAPTER VII

THE WORKMAN AND HIS WORK

MR. GIBSON was characteristically American in his habits of work and in his love of it. He wrought with a zeal and a passion which are characteristic of the race from which he came. And the early, abrupt, and untimely close of his brilliant career must be charged almost wholly to this fiery passion for work, this ardor in doing.

One comes upon traces of this characteristic very early in his career. His own letters as well as the letters of his friends written in his youth show that, very soon after leaving "The Gunnery" at any rate, he acquired the habit of continuous application, and became an expert at it. No sooner had he made up his mind what he would do in life, than he began to do it with all his might. He felt the pressure of need, and responded to it promptly and vigorously. He lost no time, he spared no pains to train himself for his career. He realized his lack of education in art, and that he had to furnish out of himself both discipline and knowledge. There was in his mind evidently but one way to supply the defects of technical education, which to so many would have seemed insuperable

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obstacles. He could overcome everything by work. He knew how to "toil terribly." He spared no time, no trial, no tasking of himself. After he had done a good day's work in the things he was under contract to do for his employers, he would turn to work again for himself and upon schemes of his own, and would spend hours more in the most absorbing labor. If any student of his work should wonder how his swift success was won, and how he so soon made good his defects of education and training, they may find their answer in that one word—work. It was his talisman. That he had gifts, power, genius, he believed most implicitly. It was that which gave him courage ; but he knew, too, that genius without work is an engine without steam. A letter which he wrote to his mother during the progress of his first drawing for the "Aldine," of the Inness landscape is his own confession of excessive industry, and gives a glimpse at the same time of the fiery zeal and undoubting courage which possessed him.

"I had intended writing to you during the early part of the week, as I had a message to send you; but I have been so excessively busy that I could find no moment of time. . . . I have worked very hard during the past few weeks, not only during the day, but in the evenings also, yea, even until the morning on several occasions. The object of my labors you of course understand is the Inness picture.

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Well, it is finished and has been universally admired. I have drawn nearly the whole of it in the night-time here at home, as my days have been occupied by O. J. & Co.'s work. I have (with reason) been very anxious over this 'Aldine' picture of mine. Everybody has told me that I was too headstrong to attempt such a large drawing for my first start in landscape, and no one imagined that I would succeed. Roberts told me that he knew I would not succeed and that I ought to have commenced on something smaller at first. Others have said: 'It's a pretty big start to commence with a full page in the finest American illustrated journal.' But I have commenced and my drawing has been admired, accepted and paid for by Mr. Sutton, and is to appear in the 'Aldine' in the course of a few months. I am going to study very hard on landscape henceforth, as I feel convinced of success. . . . I have received congratulations on all sides, for it is not a small thing to get a drawing accepted in the 'Aldine.' I, of course, am very much encouraged and am determined that my next drawing shall be an improvement on my last."

While he was writing those lines his mother was writing to him, in warning and caution against his undue application:

"I hope your picture will be done before long, so that you will not have to work at night. Depend upon it you will lose strength and eyesight by unwise

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application. I am uneasy to find that you are trying your strength to its utmost limit. Do be advised."

Receiving the news of his success with his work, she sends him her congratulations, and renews her motherly—and timely—cautions. It is all very interesting reading in the light of what followed; for it is to be remembered that all these letters were written in 1872, when Gibson was but twenty-two,—a mere stripling just entering the lists!

"SANDY HOOK, *Tuesday Eve., March 12/72.*

"MY DEAR WILLIE:

"Excuse this peculiar note-paper! Henry has gone out to spend the evening, and I cannot find the family supply without more hunting round than is worth while for mere appearance's sake. I was surprised and delighted at the good news in your welcome letter this noon! Certainly it was a great deal more than I expected, and I think your success, in such an ambitious effort, the first time, and with the 'Aldine,' is truly wonderful. I can only account for it by the explanation, that your talent in art is an intuition, a gift, by which you are, and will be, enabled to surpass those who would seem to be more likely to succeed than you, on account of greater practice and education in that particular. But even if this is the case, that would not be enough of itself, and you add to it an industry, a perseverance, and a courage which put

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you straight through. I cannot see why, if your health and strength are spared, yours should not yet become a prominent name among American artists. If you study, work, and continue to add to your knowledge and skill, you will, by and by, begin to compose, and once well started in that line, your future is made, and your best ambition satisfied. I congratulate you most sincerely and lovingly, and thank God that he has endowed you with a rare and blessed gift. *Now, don't keep on working at night.* You must see that it is very unwise, and that for the future you should not allow yourself to be tempted into it."

His early friend, Mr. Beard, from whom the fortunes of business had separated him, wrote to him in the same warning strain. Would that these friendly counsels had been heeded! It was this burning of the candle at both ends which forecast the early end of it all at forty-six. But who can think of this letter as addressed to the boy in whom Mr. Gunn could awaken no spontaneous industry!

"Do you know, I think that in many ways our divorce is a mistake. I am perhaps more prosperous, but not so happy as in the old times when we were together; and had we waited a little while we would have found ample space for both to swim without interfering with each other. The tide was rising. It has risen very high for you at least, and I have been and now am heartily glad that it is so.

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"You need my laziness and carelessness to temper your consuming ambition. You need to alternately get indignant, and laugh, and argue, and double shuffle, if you would avoid the horrors of an early grave. Of course it is not becoming to your station and position to do this, but to wear your dignity always is as bad as being condemned to a dress suit and tight shoes without the possibility of a change. Forgive an old friend for speaking so freely, but I have a real affection for you and I believe that you need this admonition. Your work is killing you, because you are so fierce at it, and don't let up at all. I know Parsons thinks as I do and in fact you must know it yourself."

Seven years later, in 1879, his wife in a letter to his mother reveals the same habit, and prophesies, alas! too truthfully, the inevitable result. She says:

"Will, I believe, will always be busy day and night until he breaks down in health. I think that would be the only thing (except, perhaps, a fortune) which would put a stop to his midnight work. I certainly thought he would be ill after his last strain. He was so weak after remaining in the house so long, and using his brain so continuously, that when the last day came and he was copying his manuscript, he nearly fainted. Only a few more strains like that will be necessary to weaken his constitution seriously."

But not only did he overdraw upon the hours he ought to have spent in sleep. He was always at it

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while he was awake. He was not a fitful workman, busy by turns, but taking equal turns at idleness. He could not be idle. All times were work-times, the odds-and-ends of the day, the intervals between tasks, the moments of interruption and of waiting, he turned to the most valuable account. Among the drawings which he made for his projected botany he left a memorandum, which shows his incessant watchfulness for subjects of study, and the prompt industry which made him always ready to secure his material. He was always loaded for the game that turned up. And no scantiness of materials or of tools in the least daunted or deterred him. This is his memorandum as he wrote it :

Botany.

"Drawings made in odd moments."
"While waiting for train."
"On back of mule."
"During delay on railroad."
"On envelopes, bills, letters, check-book, on back of books, margins of newspapers, inside of a lozenge-paper, all that was available."
"On top of stage-coach, from overhanging bough while waiting."
"On boats in water; on back of mule."
"While sketching; strolls in park."
"On city fence while waiting for car, yard specimen."

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"From specimens dried to shreds."

"From specimens collected in hat or under hat sweat-band."

"On ferry-boat from specimens picked in city yards."

"Flower reconstructed from dried specimens on fruity stems entangled in spider-web. (Spider an ally.)"

"Leaf. Impression with soot at hotels everywhere; intricate details in a few seconds."

"Seeds from spider-webs and bird's-nests."

Let indolence meditate this matter.

Not even the working hours seem to have been sufficient for him. He also trenched upon the term sacred to sleep, and in one instance, at least, did his planning in his dreams. For a time before the publication of the "Sharp Eyes" articles was begun in Harper's "Young Folks," Gibson was casting about for some new idea for a book, some hint or inspiration or theme which should serve to focalize his thoughts and materials. One morning he said to his wife: "I dreamed out a whole book last night. I never had such a vivid dream. The whole scheme came to me, and I know just what I will do. I am going over to Harpers' to talk it over with them." This he immediately did, offering them fifty-two articles, to serve as a sort of naturalist's almanac. The contract was agreed upon and he began work immediately. He often thereafter referred to his "lucky

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dream." It was, perhaps, the most popular of his books, and, whatever its origin, was certainly in itself a very wide-awake volume.

His note-books are witnesses of the same character and tenor. They show, of course, his thorough study of every project on which his mind was engaged. They show also how his brain teemed with new projects and outlined new schemes, before he was done with old ones. His purposes were always far outrunning his capacity to perform. Yet if ever a man could do two or three things at a time, he was the one. At least his motto might well have been that remorseless pledge to continual industry, "Nulla dies sine linea." One of his note-books dates from April, 1877, and runs to June 12, 1896, a month before he died, covering thus a period of nineteen years. In it is a record of every day's work in all that time; and if there was not a line drawn every day, on some days he drew enough to fully make good the deficit and fulfil the very letter of the proverb. Sometimes the entries record every item of his work, like the following, taken at random:

"March 29. Boston on business."
"April 9. Cover design for 'Sharp Eyes.'"
" " " Art Artisans' Institute."
" " 13. All day on proof of 'Sharp Eyes.'"
" " 14. " " " " " " "
" " 15. New York ½ day, ½ on 'Sharp Eyes.'"

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"April 16. ½ day on proof, 'Sharp Eyes.'"

" " " Art Artisans' 2 hours, 3 hours in evening on proofs."

"April 17. Whole day on proofs."

" " 18. ½ day on proof."

" " 20. Initial, design, 'Shakespeare's Country.'"

"April 20. Initial, design, illustration of apple-blossom."

"April 20. Design for 'Sharp Eyes,' 'Bees.'"

So the pages run, by scores and by hundreds. But elsewhere he condenses the story of a season's continuous work into a few lines. After the date May 18, 1887, he wrote :

"Left for Hilltop—

"A very busy summer. Made many drawings for two prospective articles on 'Midnight Rambles,' and 'Insect Botanists,' beside many flower studies, and a number of water-colors. Very busy on the memorial volume of Mr. Gunn. Made a large number of drawings for Botany."

Then follow pages of entries recording the sketches, designs, water-colors, illustrations, which in part constituted the details of that "busy summer." The following year he made a similar condensation of a European trip. It is but a note, yet the single item which refers to "three hundred photographs," tells the story of his busy days :

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"Trip to Europe. Left New York in April, returned in June. Visited England, France, Holland, Switzerland, including a fortnight each in London and Paris. Brought home over 300 instantaneous photographs, taken under all conditions by my detective camera. Went direct to Hilltop, and settled down to magazine work."

These note-books carry the evidence of his faithfulness to his various aims and lines of interest. While he was at work as the artist, he never hesitated to do something for himself as either naturalist or author. He was never so preoccupied with his sketching that his ear could not catch a new bird-note, or his eye perceive an event in the insect-world. His color box often did duty as a botanist's case, or bore home a load of cocoons and beetles. And when he sat down to record his impressions or outline his plans he revealed his triple interest in every line. Once he began certain memoranda which he headed "Night-Notes." In the margin, by a dozen hasty lines with his pen he made a design for a title-page,—a lighted candle with moths flying about it. Then he wrote into his text ideas which should interest the future reader of some article, upon the scientific side, in sentences which suggest at once the illustrations and the text itself:

"Moths creeping up screen outside window, their presence marked only by their luminous eyes. The

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lamp the center of a whirling maze of all sorts of nocturnal insects. A rare treat spread on the table before me. Exquisite hints for the colorist, decorator, or illustrator. Here a dainty mite of a moth with the most delicate of sage-green, flat-open wings, crossed by bands of cream-color. Another with steeple-roofed wings (at rest) glistening like satin, decorated with faint contrast of pale pink and and faded olive." And so on for pages together.

Such passages as these from his own notes, never meant for the public eye, and therefore absolutely conclusive of his sincerity and his real spirit, show how truly he was an observer at first hand. He saw things for himself. There was not a trace of cant in what he had to say about original observation of nature, her wonders and her beauties. The thing he tried to lead others to do he had already done himself. A friend, who is himself a keen observer of nature, wrote of Gibson, at his death:

"It was to the habit of observation more than to any endowment that he owed the prosperity of his work,—for his life was a successful one. It enabled him to see clearly, without a teacher, what others find it hard to see at all. He acquired his art practically without instruction, and indeed against opposition, simply taking his pencil and brush into the field and drawing and painting what he saw there. The greatest painters are those who have pursued this

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method. As a writer and lecturer he showed the advantage of a good scholastic education; yet his themes were those he had chosen and worked out for himself. He was as well-informed on botany, entomology, ornithology, and allied studies as almost any professors of these sciences that could be named; yet it was in the woods and fields rather than in books that he acquired his knowledge."

Gibson's own words, in the preface to "Sharp Eyes," confirm his friend's reflection: "The facts in the following pages are almost entirely drawn from individual experience, largely gathered in boyhood, the apparently random selection being based upon a desire for the greatest variety possible within a limited range of the minor flora and fauna. The dates are apportioned from careful notes verified through a record of many years."

It was this close and personal observation of nature which gave him his rare power in drawing and in composition. He never wished to make his pictures with the models, the objects he was drawing, before him. He studied them in sketches, and mastered every detail of their construction and appearance. This impression, clear-cut, exact, truthful, he carried in his memory. And when he wished to draw it, he worked from memory, refreshed, perhaps, by the memorandum of the sketch; but his picture would be suffused by the glow of his own imagination, idealized

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"Wide-Awake Day-Dozers"

("Strolls by Starlight and Sunshine")
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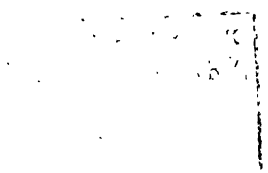

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by that imperceptible increment which is merely the self, the personal temperament of the artist, lighting up his subject. His memory furnished the anatomy of his subject, and his imagination infused it with life. It was the thing as it was, and something more. Because it was the thing as he saw it. His view of the function of the sketch, and, indeed, his theory of art, condensed into small compass, is well put by himself, in a paragraph from "The Squirrel's Highway":

"Humility is the only attitude that wins the heart of nature. It yields the glow that lights the vision of the 'inward eye,' beside which all other eyes are blind. Audacity and impressionism have their importance and place in art, but they are not its pinnacle; the one yields helpful courage for the encounter, the other is the useful short-hand system which often comes to the artist's rescue, and without whose aid many of nature's most rare and subtle expressions would elude him, and be lost. But its function is realized in the sketch or motive, which is rarely a picture, but more often a rough draft, a hieroglyph, a stenographic note, which like others of its class is fully intelligible alone to its author, and whose only rational excuse for being is in its latent possibilities of ultimate translation and perfection."

That was the method of the artist; and it grew naturally and logically from the nature of the man. He agreed at bottom with the impressionists, because

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he painted and drew only what he saw. His point of difference with them was that he painted and drew far more than they would sanction, because he saw so much more. If the canon of the impressionists is admitted, they must be prepared frequently to see it apparently violated by some man who, while painting only what he actually sees, and getting "broad effects" and "values," sees so much more than the average observer, and notes as "values" so many things which even the ordinary trained eye slips over as insignificant, that he seems to be "descending" to details. Gibson could never have painted to suit this class, because he saw and felt so much more than they did. Yet he was as true as the most orthodox of them to the very method he seemed to defy. He had been speaking ("Highways and Byways," p. 68) of the seed-pods of the fireweed, and their hidden floss, "a warp of woven sunshine, with a woof of ether," and reasons thus about it :

"It is always awe-inspiring and wonderful to me ; it is beautiful beyond description ; and when I see those snowy forms take wing and fly heavenward, it is more than beautiful, it is divine. And yet it would seem that there are those among her students who are above the influence of such a revelation as this in Nature. Disciples of a rampant superficial school of art, who in seeking to portray Nature 'in her breadth' would feel that they can put the straight jacket upon her and

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readily ignore so small and trivial a thing as this. The landscape to their half-blind and unsympathetic eyes resolves itself into a map, a relative opposition of so many 'masses' and 'values' of form and color. In the mastery of these lies their end and aim while Nature in her 'detail' is worthy only of the scientist and 'has no place in art.'

. . . . . .

"That Nature's landscape does, to those who seek therefor, resolve itself into so-called masses and values, is an important truth; but equally and more deeply true are the infinity and spirit of her breadth. The value of the broad gray mass of yonder sloping meadow will find its truest interpreter (assuming an equality of technical skill) in him who knows by heart its elements of life and color, who has seen its 'violet by a mossy stone,' who has plucked its grasses from their purple maze and knows the scent of those endless subtle variations of tender russets, greys, and greens, and cloudy films of smoky color that spread among its herbage. The true significance and 'value' of that massive bank of oaks will be most deeply felt and understood, and therefore most truly rendered, by him who has learned the beauty of its vernal buds of scarlet velvet, its swinging catkins, and the contour of its perfect leaf; who has stood beside its boughs, and seen the blue of sky and gray of passing cloud in turn reflected from the polished foliage.

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"The impress of that knowledge and the sympathy and companionship it implies will send its impulse quivering to his brush-tip, in a spontaneous enthusiasm that shall subdue the pigment to a medium for thought, and shall hold it in its place as the means rather than the end. And while the misguided apostle of the new school who shows us 'Nature in her breadth' shall revel in his values of turpentine, and paint and brush-marks, the transcript of his more humble brother-worker, while not less broad, shall palpitate with life and feeling, and through some secret intangible testimony of its own, shall conjure up in the beholder the heart-memories of Nature, and shall breathe her spirit from the canvas."

Perhaps it is worth while just here to rescue from oblivion the exceedingly funny account of some newspaper writer, whose story of Mr. Gibson's methods is widely at variance with that we are telling, and what Gibson himself told, but which has a certain weird charm of its own. Commenting upon the "marvelous skill" ascribed to Gibson, he proceeds to say that nothing could be simpler than his method. "When Mr. Gibson sets out on a walk he always takes a camera with him, and when an especially interesting twig or fern attracts his attention, he promptly snaps at it. On his return home the plates are sent to the nearest photographer to be developed and from the negatives thus obtained, 'bleach prints' are made. Mr. Gibson

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then proceeds to draw very carefully on these prints, following of course the outline, shading, etc., of the photograph. After the drawings are finished, all traces of the photograph are quickly bleached out by immersing them in a simple solution of chemicals, leaving only the drawings on white paper." After such a graphic and veracious account of the way in which the foremost American illustrator made his pictures, one is not surprised to have the writer add the brave statement that "it may be said without fear of contradiction that whatever excellence may exist in Mr. Gibson's published work, is due to the careful work of the photographer and the engraver." Such is the sort of stuff which some metropolitan newspapers serve up as "art criticism." The writer might indeed declare that he spoke without fear of contradiction; for nobody would take the trouble to contradict an account so ridiculous. How refreshing, after such a tissue of absurdities, to read the letter of Henry Marsh, foremost among the wood-engravers of his day, the estimate, by a real artist, of another artist:

"POMFRET CENTRE, CONN., *March 8th.*

"DEAR SIR:

"Pressure of work has prevented me from answering yours of Jan. 1st. I did not see an impression of the 'chick a dee dee' block and was surprised to find it was in any degree successful. I have never even

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seen a drawing of yours till now and have never had any idea of your artistic quality. Common printed impressions of course represent no one fairly, but those artists lose the most who have the most to lose, and you are no exception to the rule, as I should never have guessed what your drawings looked like from anything I ever have seen printed. You will certainly be disappointed in my rendering of your work, for I have no patience and my hand is not as firm or my line as delicate as your drawings require, but if you send me a block I shall do it honestly after my fashion. With hearty sympathy in the troubles which you must always find in the engraving of your most elegant and refined work, I remain

"Yours truly,

"HENRY MARSH."

Thackeray somewhere says that there are no people who so love their work as the artists do, unless it be the actors, who when they are not playing themselves are always at the theater. Even the holiday of the artist is generally devoted to work in a different locality from the home studio; so that it amounts to nothing more than a change of scene without any abatement of business. Gibson himself was one of the worst offenders in this way. He never seemed to rest, while in health, save in and by a change in the place and character of his task. In the pages of

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"Pastoral Days," in which he describes — in the chapter upon "Summer" — his visit to "Hometown and Snug-Hamlet," he confesses his propensity for thus using his vacation.

"My wife and I have run away from the city for a month or so. A vacation we call it; but to an artist such a thing is rarely known in its ordinary sense, and often, indeed, it means an increase of labor, rather than a respite. My first week, however, I had consecrated to luxurious idleness. Together we wandered through the old familiar rambles, where as boy and girl in earlier days we had been so oft together." But the sort of thing which he calls idling comes out a few pages later, when he sums up the doings of that seven days of luxury.

"For a week thus we idled, now on the mountain, now in the meadow, while I with my sketch-book and collecting-box either whiled away the hours with my pencil, or left the unfinished work to pursue the tantalizing butterfly or search for unsuspecting caterpillars among the weeds and bushes." What a busybody was this, who knew no distinction between work and play, and to whom the sketch-book and collecting-box were the playthings of the idle hour as well as the tools of the most laborious of professions! Well might the companion of that happy summer say in after years, "He seemed never to spend an idle hour." Another member of his household circle bears

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similar testimony. "If he were sitting at the table, chatting and joking with us, as likely as not he would have his pencil in his hand, and before we knew it, would dash off on any scrap of paper, some sketch of a beetle, or a bird, or a butterfly, or perhaps a caricature of somebody in the group." With this nature, steam was always up, and the fires hardly banked at all. No wonder that the machinery literally wore out prematurely.

There is one legacy of his busy life which seems to have a special interest to those who loved his work and care to know how he did it. For many years he carried in his mind a plan for a new work, which was characteristic of his genius, and would have added a new delight to those he had conferred. He meant some day to write and to illustrate a book which should describe the history of the endless movement of water, from cloud to mountain-top, from the heights to the valleys, from the valleys to the sea, and back to the clouds again. He had made many notes and references, and the scheme was well worked out in its general features. The memoranda which he left are sufficiently full to convey a clear idea of what he proposed; and as one reads them they seem to suggest all the graceful text and the graphic illustration with which his matured skill would have filled them out. While they raise the keenest disappointment in the thought that they never were com-

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pleted and that American literature and nature-study have missed what they promised, yet they are so full of hints, so stimulating to the imagination, that they seem to belong to that public for which he wrought, and which prizes every thought of his fertile mind.

On the fly-leaf of the blank-book in which these notes are entered, with long blanks for the material yet to be written in, he has written the words "Memoranda; Cycle of the Raindrop." On the next page follow a number of tentative titles:

"From the Fountain to the Deep Sea.

"The Cycle of the Raindrop.

"From the Rain Cloud to the Sea.

"A Mission of

"A Cycle of

"The Emblematic Cycle. Typical of human life. Soul from heaven. Earthly pilgrimage: dross and impurity and final resurrection in mist."

"An Eternal Pilgrimage

"A —— Pilgrimage

"The Story without an End.

Then follows a suggestion for a table of contents. He heads it,

Division of Subject

"1. The Rain Cloud and the Fountain. 'Story of a Fountain.'

"2. The Mountain Brook—(Trout Brook) (Trout Stream).

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"3. The Mountain Lake. The Swamp.
"4. The Pastoral Brook. The Pond?
"5. The River.
"6. The Delta and the Deep Sea."

This is the first and broadest sketch. Upon this ground plan he proceeds to lay out the themes he would treat, evidently having in mind both text and illustrations. Sometimes the note means one, sometimes the other. And the closeness with which the two are associated in his mind is a fine revelation of the manner in which his thought embraced both forms of production in a profound psychological unity.

1. The Rain Cloud and Spring

The birth of the spring; from perpetual snow on mountain peaks; dew; mist and cloud; storm cloud.

Rain Cloud dragging its veil on mountain-top. (See quotation from Ruskin in note-book). Poetic simile of mountain "Light of Asia" (227). Storm on mountain.

Hovering Mist and Cloud. Lifting and creeping in fantastic forms, above the lake. Wild Mountain Pass. Hermit's Ravine. See reference. Ruskin in literary memorandum. Shelley's "Cloud."

Mountain Veterans. Gnarled spruces.

Mountain Flowers. The heath family, clothing the rugged mountains.

Mountain Fruits. "Propitiating the Mountain-gods

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The Roxbury Road

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by a sacrifice of their fruits." Thoreau. Supper of blue-berries. Thoreau.

The Trickling Mountain Spring. "Amy's Grotto."

A Dewdrop on leaf (vignette-idea ; or tail-piece).

Primeval Elements. Indian Legends, etc. Story of a Fountain. Primeval spring and incident. Hawthorne.

A Trickling Passage. Drops trickling down a spray of Fumitory (Adlumia) over rock.

A Recluse. A shy wood flower.

Indian Pipe—legend ?

Loiterings among mossy boulders and ferns.

The Wood-bird's Bath.

The Harebell.

A Fungus. Some beautiful specimen of Hydnum Agaricum or—

Through the Mossy Groove (bole)—to the old Trough.

Water Trough. This subject must come in book. Make view from above conduit, and looking out through verdure upon road from back of trough. See Hawthorne's "Town Pump." "David Swan."

Waste Water Running along road and under. Plank Bridge (with roadside ford) bordered with tall Galingales, Cat-tails etc.

The Meadow Stream (place after mountain-lake ?)

The Meadow Rue (shadow or silhouette).

Sensitive Fern (one of the most antiquated forms of existing ferns).

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Cardinal Flower.

A Border Tangle. Galium. Rue.

Coils of Gold. The Jewel-weed (or some other plant). Strangled by the golden dodder. The dodder is mentioned in Lowell's "Threnodia" as an emblem of love. It is a questionable sort of love that hangs on by the teeth. "Deadly gripe of gold" (Hawthorne).

Hemlock cones and Chickadees.

An Ambuscade. Leaf-nest of large Arachnid.

The Alders.

Gathering Cowslip-greens (combine with picture of plant).

The Trout Brook

The Angler. (Consult Izaak Walton. "Contemplative Man's Recreation.")

Beauties (good subject for tail-piece).

The Water-mill. Children playing with toy-wheel. See sketch made at Cumberland, Me.

A Trickling Flume. A mossy flume perched on tall beams, embowered in leafy branches and overgrown with weeds. See photo. and sketch of "Haunted Mill" with mill in distance.

The Sawmill (combine cider-mill with same? Washington).

"Highland Stream tamed by human cunning." Hawthorne.

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Riding on Sawmill Carry. Children riding out over abyss on the log-carry.

Under the Mill (old wheel, etc.).

Sheepwashing.

Life under the Water. (Crawfish; leopard-frog, etc.) Under the Water. Battle of dragon-fly and lizard. Caddis-worms and nests.

The Slender Foot-bridge—"Dangerous passage." Bubby fishing; three or four minnows on string. Lovers.

The Witch Hazel. (Several subjects. See memoranda in "Nature Jottings.") Unfurling banners and saluting coming snow. The Divining Rod. Old Witch. Witch hazel; (see Whittier's Poem, Preface or dedication?) Shrub over Brook. Peculiar Quality of perfume. Horizontal Foliage in Wood. Reference in Hawthorne.

Into the Lake. Cascade over precipice into Lake. Boating and fishing.

The Camp. (Adirondacks. See sketch.)

Morning on the Lake (Water-color sketch, deer drinking).

Evening. Hunting with jack. (Dudley Warner's "Deer hunt.") "The Loon's weird laughter, far away."

The Rise. Trout rising; flash of sun on still water. "Long ripple." Thoreau.

Guide Lore.

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Sand Orchid. Secret of fertilization. Lovell's Pond, several varieties——

Pond Lilies? (or on brook?) Yellow pond lilies. Hawthorne's simile.

The Water Mussel. Beautiful pearl. Saranac lake. Wondrous tints brought out by scouring with sand.

Tiger-beetles on Sand. (Show nests.)

Heron's Nest (see cut in Harper's). Evening Subject. Weird Effect.

The Plover.

Evening Mist. Mist rising. Returning skyward. Sun drawing water.

Wild Ducks.

The Bittern. "His precious legs." Thoreau.

Water Adder. (Winnepesaukee incident, see note-book "Nature Jottings.")

The Outlet. A Chasm. "Ausable Chasm."

The Brook (Shepaug?)

The Water-fence.

A Hot Day (cows in water in shade).

Under the Water. Caddis Worms in nest. (Life under ice. Thoreau.) Dragon-fly larvæ.

Battle under Water. "No refuge e'en in water." Lizard and dragon-fly larva. Aquarium incident.

Scouring Rush (grass) gatherers. See quotations.

The Little Sandpipers.

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Ephemera. (The creatures of an hour. The twilight flight.)

The Crossing Pole (Newtown brook. Children over dark still current).

The Swimming Hole. (Bathers. Twilight effect. Interrupted Bath.)

The Old Bridge.

On the Muddy Beam (Phebe nest or other bird).

A Gravel Island. (Thoreau's sentiments on beholding an island.)

A Pebbly Beach.

A Still Nook in Shore. Gnats emerging. Boats of Eggs.

A Sungleam from the River bed. Minnow or Sunfish turning. Combine same with Kingfisher, if possible, showing the incident of prey from the fish's standpoint, under water looking out above. Consult Thoreau's "Concord River" and his experiences in taming the fish.

The Willows. The Closed Gentian. The Button-bush.

Sailing the Boat.

The Kingfisher (watching for the gleam).

A Bit of Sentiment. Two figures by the brink; thoughts of brook, etc. Similes.

The Freshet. Broken Dam. Ice Blockade. Ice piling and crushing against mill.

A Tumultuous Record. Water sculpture. Torrent

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making holes in rocks. Worn by boulders. Diana's Baths, Shepaug Falls. Glassy Ice on Dripping Twigs.

The Swamp

(This section should be introduced here as a "loitering-place" of the saunterer as well as of the brook,—a rest in the journey of the waters when they linger placidly in the old mill-pond, backing-up from the dam, and flooding the lowlands. Although it might be brought in between the mountain-lake and the brook.)

Consider the Black Mountain Swamp for example; Beaver dam, Lenox. Cotton sedge; Sarracenia; Pond lilies; Sphagnum.

A Quaint Cradle. Nest of Reed Warbler or other bird built among reeds or rushes.

Musk-rat Huts. A Musquash Village. Muskrat's bubble under the ice, driven away from its heath. See "Trapper"; also Thoreau. The provident musk-rat.

Scouts. Spring Heralds. Skunk cabbage.

Winter Botany. Crystalline Botany; Thoreau. It is the anatomy which determines the marked character and distinct individuality of plants, even of the same genus. The winter phantoms present its most perfect and unencumbered articulation, and render their forms against the snow especially conspicuous. Thus have I counted, without effort, eight species of golden-rod, growing in a tangle each as

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distinctly specific as in its summer dress and ornament.

A Frost Grotto.

Will o' the Wisp. A fantasy with fairies, nymphs, or naiads.

Haunt of the Hylas.

Cranberry Culture. The Cranberry plant.

After Bullfrogs. Spatter Dock, turtles, etc.; turtles on a projecting log or rock, family group. Pollywogs. Duckweed. Specimen of similar plant. Green shell-like, nerve-like leaf, floating on surface and sending downward a fringe of purplish black rootlets. Found at Washington, spring of 1882.

A Living Opal. A fairy creature of the marsh. This is described in my note-book about two years ago, and I note that Mr. John Burroughs has discovered the same creature and has written of it under title "A Fairy," in Scribner's, January, 1883.

Pickerel Weed and Pickerel.

Vallisneria—Anacharsis; waterweed.

Swamp plants for selection. (Here follows a list of some twenty plants.)

Transformation of Neuroptera.

Exquisite Bivalves in the mud (small pearly clams).

The Brook (Continued)

The Millpond.

The Water adder (see notes Lake Winnepesaukee).

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Nymphæ; maids of the pond (nymphs floating in mist above the floating lilies. See John Lafarge, portfolio proofs).

Among the Pond-lilies. The Lotus-lily with cup capsule. Allied to Eastern lily. Suggestion of the Nile.

Mirror of the Sunset. (Reflections. Still pond. Mill dam.)

The Heron.

Winter Sports on the Ice. Fishing. Harvesting the Ice-crop. Waiting for a Bite (comic character). (See Wordsworth "To win a pittance from the cold, unfeeling lake.")

The Grist-Mill. The Miller. (A character from life; Standing at window of mill door. "The mills of the gods."

Under the Fall. (Foam. Bubbles that reflect the glories of the world.)

Swallows. (Skimming over water. "Swallows skating on the air.")

Below the Dam. The Ripples. The marriage of the Waters; (see Poem, Burns). The Camp. Shad-fishing.

The River

The Osprey. (Rising with fish. Tumult of water. Bald eagle and catfish, incident, Cape Cod.) See Wolf's "Wild Animals."

The Canoe (modern and Indian).

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The Toll Bridge. (Old covered bridge in spans.) Bennett's Bridge. Glimpse out from openings of bridge.

The Toll-man's daughter. (Pathos. Dragging the River. The white face among the lily-pads.)

Drifting. (Sentiment.)

Spearing Fish by night.

Drawing the Seine.

The Rope Ferry. (North Hampton.)

Calling the Ferry in "ye olden tyme." (The swarthy boatman. The Ferryman's Cottage. Interior of Cottage.)

Cascade and Factories. (Moonlight.)

Through a Large Manufacturing Town.

Picturesque Factories.

Approach to Salt Water. (Stooping from boat to drink from the river,—brackish water! This and the presence of the mallows which had escaped our notice, betoken the inroads of the sea.)

Rest this section herewith.

The Delta and the Deep Sea

Navigation. (Scene on Hudson, or Connecticut, or Mississippi. Barges. Twilight from ferry-boat; (further on?)

Snipe Shooting.

Wild Ducks. (Chesapeake Bay. Clouds of duck, —and hunters.)

Salt Marshes. (Gathering Salt hay. See Sound sketches. "Picturesque America.")

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Crab-fishing. (Sheepshead Bay.)

Low Tide on Marsh. (Fiddler crabs, playing about holes.)

From the edge of the Boat. (A natural aquarium. Hermit Crabs, fishes, mussels, algæ.)

Samphire gatherers. (See Hawthorne. Footprints on Seashore. Samphire luncheon.)

The Prickly Opuntia. (Allude to the wondrous caress of the stamina. A beautiful cactus, common on our shores, yet quite unknown.)

Fisherman's Huts. (Quaint houses made of canal-boats. Half canal-boat, set up on end. See studio prints.)

Gathering Sea-weeds.

A Nursling of the Sea. (Beautiful floating Laminaria.)

The Throng at the Surf. (Coney Island or Rockaway.)

Oyster-dredging. (Water in action—picturesque boat.)

Among the Driftwood. Eggs of shark or skate.

Wind-waves on Sand. (Original explanation.)

Sand Yellow-Jackets digging caves in sand.

Sand-spider. Gossamer tunnel. Fierce maternal solicitude.

Fairy Circles in Sand (around bending grasses.)

Faint Columns of Gnats in still twilight rising like streaks of smoke from salt-marshes.

A Marsh nest.

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Gulls.

Tiger Beetles and holes.

Under the Water.

Rocky Headland. (Mt. Desert, Nahant.)

The Sporting Shoal. Porpoises.

The Vasty Deep. Limitless Mid-ocean.

The Return of the Waters. Waterspout. Earth and Heaven. Finis. A link completing the cycle. Tail-piece.

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CHAPTER VIII

THE PERSONAL SIDE

THERE is a curious notice of Gibson's work, written for a leading New York publication in 1882, which is calculated to fill the minds of his friends with wonder, not unmingled with amusement. The writer attempts a portrait of Gibson's soul, and does it, as the Irishman made his chopping-block, "out of his own head." "In some way," he (or she) says, "Mr. Gibson has never classed himself in our mind with the profession of illustrators, but has seemed rather to stand apart, to work in his own ways, to avoid association, to prefer lonely walks, to follow his own bent, no matter where it leads, and irrespective of any who come after him. These impressions have given a certain solitariness to his figure, so that we fancy him wandering alone up and down the earth, a man of silence, a man of keen and penetrating eye, of ear attent, of swiftly susceptible feelings, who searches out nature in her recesses, and coyest moods, is on the friendliest terms with her, to whose delicate touch she lends herself with an indulgence which coarser lovers are denied"! That extraordinary sketch of the personality of the man is a most felicitous antithesis of

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the real Gibson. It happily describes what he was not. It is a capital portrait of somebody else. Just where the writer got his materials for such a description, it would be hard to tell. Certainly not from personal contact with the subject. It sounds like a far-off account of Thoreau; as if he had been taken as the likeliest type of a thoroughgoing nature lover, and the lines drawn after the similitude of his strange nature. But it would be hard to find two men in more total contrast than Thoreau and Gibson. The former may have loved "to stand apart, to work in his own ways, to avoid association, to prefer lonely walks." But the latter loved to touch elbows with his fellow-men; to cultivate friendships and share the joys of society; to walk with a company of congenial spirits, from whom he was always learning something, unless they were those to whom he could always teach something. He was not the least bit of a recluse. A hermitage would have had no charms for him. For he was, in the highest sense, "a man of the world," who loved his kind, and loved to live with them. There was no "solitariness" about him. He was eminently social. So far was he from "wandering alone up and down the world," that he always drew a crowd about him, wherever he went. He was no McGregor, to usurp the head of the table; but wherever Gibson was, there was the center of the circle. And, far from being "a man of silence," he

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was the freest and easiest of talkers, accessible, communicative, as genial as sunshine, as fluent as a brook.

The nature which was in him began to express itself from the earliest years. In his school-days he was anything but the shy, retiring child which would be the father of such a man as our critic described; and his love and yearning for companionship and the expression of affection come out in almost every one of his juvenile letters. It is so seldom that a boy's letters really express the boy's life that one does not feel that they have any permanent interest. But the boy Gibson wrote letters which deserve to be preserved. They are as quaint as if they were fictitious. They could not have been truer to life if they had been made out of whole cloth. It would be hard to match the following, written when he was twelve years old, from the "Gunnery"; its quaint and naïve boyishness is delicious:

"WASHINGTON, *March 1, 1863.*

"DEAR MOTHER:

"I received your letter for the first in three weeks and was as happy as a king and I am now. you may expect a letter from me every week.

"Only till the latter part of this month before the Exhibition, and then comes vacation which I long for very much. Every Friday the boys act a drama; the last one was 'Love in '76,' and it was perfectly

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splendid and the one before that was 'Romance under Difficulties,' and that was better than the last. I wish you could send me up some small dramas because I would like to read them.

"The principal thing among the boys is catching mice with little box traps, (like the one that Grandpa made two or three summers ago) which we make ourselves. One of the boys took some hoopskirt and made a cage to keep his mice in and I made two and have got four traps. The boy that made the first trap made the first cage and he is a very ingenious boy his name is Charley Howard he is a nice boy and is liked throughout this whole great institution as well as the other boys too.

"It is a very unpleasant day first in the morning it snowed and next it rained and now it is snowing again and looks as if it would snow a long while it is dark dismal and foggy.

"I am very sorry that Cotty has so many boils, because I can imagine how they feel but you must tell him he must try to be as patient as Job if he can. The other evening I touched the tip end of my nose to the stove pipe the stove pipe being hot burnt the tip of my nose off so now everywhere I go I am laughed at. It don't hurt me any to be laughed at if they leave my nose alone that is all I ask.

"The other day I was sliding out in the grove on the ice and I slipped and fell and struck on my sore

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knee and now it cracks just like it did first, only it don't hurt me so much, but I guess I will get over it before long. I am known in this school by the name of Fatty and Pussy and am so used to it that I take it as my own name.

"Please ask Julie and Henry if they think that they are big enough to read letters, and if they say yes tell them I will write to them you tell me in your next letter. In your answer let Hubie write as he did in one of your letters.

"And now as I have written you a long letter I will stop. Sending love to you all and give them all a kiss for me.

"From your aff. Willie.

"P. S. Excuse bad writing as I have a sore finger."

The same winter he wrote to his sister; and surely nothing could be more delightfully artless than the patronizing little moral harangue with which the letter begins — a strain which ends in such complacent satisfaction over his own success as a good boy! It must have been mightily encouraging to the little girl. But when he drops into narrative and gives such a vivid account of his skating adventures, one begins to feel the real boy's heart again:

"WASHINGTON, *Feb. 24, 1863.*

"DEAR JULIE:

"I guess that you are getting to be a great big girl by this time and I hope that you are trying to be a

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good girl too and that you are trying to correct all your bad habits. I am trying to do it and succeed very well.

"I will now tell you about my last skate; we all started at half past nine in the morning and went to a lake warramaug which is 5 miles from Mr. Gunn's house I walked up there and put on my skates and off I went like a streak of blue greased lightning and the ice was as smooth as glass and a foot thick after I skated about four hours, something happened. did the ice break, No! did my skate break, No! My buckle, NO! the clouds broke and their contents were spilled upon the earth and you had better believe that I got off my skates and put for home with my legs in my boots. It was a snow storm. On going home I summed up how many miles I had been that day and found out that I had gone on my own legs no body else's you understand, I had that day gone 20 miles. the next day I was sick. I soon got over it and was all right again.

"I remain your aff. Brother

"Willie.

"Give love to all write soon."

Sometime during this same year he wrote in quite a different vein to his mother. He shows a spirit "strenuous" enough to suit the most aggressive, and as tender as strenuous. There are two or three points of school ethics which appear with much force in his account of the trouble:

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"The other night a few of the boys (Henry and I included) were playing 'blind man's buff' in the kitchen, and I was it and one of the boys got a hand full of pepper and doused it in Henry's eyes. of course Henry cried some, but you could n't get him to tell Mr. Gunn and at last one of the boys Daniel B. Gunn told Mr. Gunn and he called him in there and sent all the other boys to bed. When I was just getting in bed, a knock came at my door and I opened it and there stood 'Henry' with a handkerchief up to his face a crying he kissed me good night and went in his room. Pretty soon after I went in his room and he was still crying and told him not to mind it but keep a wet handkerchief to it and it wouldn't ache much, so he did so and he felt quite comfortable. I told Ralph (which was the boy that did it) if he ever did another thing of the kind to my brother, I would knock him down, and I think I ought to. If I had only seen Ralph do it I would have knocked him down on the spot and teach him to mind his own business.

"According to Mr. Gunn's rules 'Stick up for your Brother' and I mean to do it.

"With love to all, I remain your aff. son.

"WILLIE."

Other letters written in these delightful school-days show him at the time when the boy-mind begins to realize the importance of dress and of personal adornment.

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The episode of the diamond pin is told with characteristic frankness and vivacity. But another paragraph from the letter shows a most commendable fondness for his old hat—a marked evidence of the genuine sentiment of the boy's nature. The description of the football field and its unfailing perils carries a contemporaneous interest; and a boy's account of his studies is always fascinating reading. The brief story of the prayer-meeting in "Willie Beecher's" room and his confidence in the leader who "can explain about any passage in the Bible" must close these glimpses into the real heart of an unspoiled and ingenuous boy. They are a key to his nature,—its frankness, heartiness, enjoyment of simple things, a self-confidence that was destined to help him touch the goal of a great success, singularly combined with a humility which kept him always open to reproof, correction, and instruction in righteousness. They show his warm and affectionate nature, which never changed but to deepen and sweeten as he matured. They reveal his earnestness and sincerity; traits which underlie all his qualities like the bedrock of the continent, and on which his fun and frolic grew as naturally as grass and foliage out of the soil which masks and clothes the granite:

"WASHINGTON, CONN., *May 21, 1864.*

"DEAR MOTHER:

"I arrived here safely. Meeting Willie B. and Bertie B. & Mary Gunn all at Newtown in the cars. We

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had a very pleasant time coming up & Mrs. Gunn was delighted with the Tulips. Everybody noticed my diamond pin, & I tell you what!!!! They praise it up, saying & asking me how much it cost? and having me stand still, so that they might see it, once in a while I do *stand still* & let them feast their eyes on it. Some of them ask me if it is glass set round with Gutta Percha and brass. I always tell them 'yes of course.' I tell you what!! I'm proud of it and *will keep it* & conform to your rules. I wear it whenever I go to school & put the guard on my shirt, so if the tie should fall of it would be held on. I suppose you remember the blue tie that you got me. I wore it up from N. Y. to here, & my rough coat rubbing against it made it look awful, bringing out all the shoddy, and making it look like down all over the tie.

"When I got home I took every bit of the white stuff out & now all the boys think it looks a great deal prettier. Dear Mother I want to tell you something about that hat. It is one that I have had two winters, and I like it because it is so old. I would rather have this one than a new one, and the other is not fit to wear and doesn't fit me, so Henry may have a new one.

"Mrs. Gunn thinks that I ought to have my own old hat. And she is going to try and have the other one fixed up for Henry.

"Here I must stop, I am your affectionate Son,

"WILLIE."

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"WASHINGTON, CONN.,
"*Dec. 6, 1864.*

"MY DEAR MOTHER:

"It is a very cold day, and we have just come in from out doors. We all have been playing foot ball Which is a very exciting game However I dont play much for the simple reason, that I am too short winded. A great many of the boys get their shins kicked, but I am very fortunate, for I have never got *mine* kicked but once and then I kicked it myself, when I *meant* to have kicked the foot-ball. At all times of the recess you can look about the green and see certain boys hopping about holding one leg up, and crying.

. . . . . .

"This year I study a great many lessons, Latin, Anatomy, Book-keeping, Spelling, & Arithmetic. In Latin, I get along nicely. It seems a great deal easier this term than it ever has yet. In Anatomy I get along perfectly splendid. I know every bone in your body and the latin (or Scientific) names of them all. in book-keeping I get along nicely. In Arithmetic I am in square root and I understand it perfectly. I guess that if Mr. Gunn writes to you, he will say that I get along very well in my studies, and you can tell Father so too.

"I suppose that he thinks that I idle away my time writing letters. to be sure I do write a great many

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letters, but I *don't* write them until all my studies are learned. now this is so. And while a person is away from home he wants to hear from his friends. All the boys write a great many letters.

"Please send me some postage stamps in your letter.

"Here I must stop with love to all.

"I remain your aff. Son WILLIE."

"WASHINGTON, CONN.,
"*Jan. 22, 1865.*

"MY DEAR MOTHER:

"Are you getting better, I hope so. I am very anxious about you, & you must not think that I forget you, because I think of you all the time, and pray for you every night.

"Willie Beecher has a prayer-meeting in his room every saturday night, & a great many boys attend. I am one of them, and I am liked more this term than any yet. Willie is superintendent and he can explain, about any passage in the bible, to us, so that we can perfectly understand it."

But the poor boy did not always keep his lofty and self-approving mood. Near the close of the same year he had occasion to realize how hard it is to tread the right line of virtue. His wrath at one of the boys and his doings got the better of his good feeling, and he vented himself in some strong language written to one of the boys at home. This, being brought to his

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mother's attention, drew down a sharp reprimand, which was quite effectual,—almost too effectual one feels, on reading dear Mrs. Gunn's calm and wise view of it. But the quick, passionate grief of the repentant boy shows his warm and wholesome heart:

"WASHINGTON, *Dec. 9th, 1863.*

"DEAR MOTHER:

"I received your letter and with repeated sobs heard Mrs. Gunn read it to me. I am very sorry for what I said in Frank's letter and I sincerely promise that I never will commit such a wrong again. And do please forgive me this time and take me into your arms again. Tell Mrs. Howard if you see her that I am very sorry and will never permit such a thing to come out of my mouth again. I will write to Frank and apoligize for it. And I don't think you will ever reprove me of such a wrong again.

"With much love I remain your affectionate Son

"WILLIE.

"*He that calleth his brother a fool is in danger of hell fire.* I will remember this."

When this letter went to his mother Mrs. Gunn sent the following with it.

"*Wednesday eve.*

"MY DEAR MRS. GIBSON:

"Willie was almost heartbroken, when he heard your letter, which he had given to me to read to him, without a suspicion of its contents. He went immediately,

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without prompting from any one, and wrote this answer. I am glad to see that he makes no attempt to excuse himself, and I rejoice that the 'expression' came so soon to your knowledge. He will never forget the lesson. I know he is not in the habit of using such expressions, and cannot account for his having written it. I think he does not quarrel at all with Henry. You will think from Henry's letter to Juliet, that he is suffering from homesickness, but he seems perfectly happy. His mother's letter made him long to see you all and he wrote to Juliet immediately. He and Bertie are very happy together and he is getting on nicely now with all the boys. At first he used to get himself into trouble constantly by calling them names, and treating them as I suppose he had been treated by village boys in Newtown. I presume it was that which made Willie write of him as he did, as he was very much annoyed by it. I have heard nothing of it for some days past, and conclude that he has discovered the way to live happily and pleasantly with the other boys. He is a dear little fellow and always good to us, obedient and cheerful.

In haste, yours sincerely,

"A. J. GUNN."

In a letter written a week later he comes back to the subject in the same tone of grief and honest penitence; and he gives another glimpse at his real nature.

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For when a boy tells you what he thinks about after he has gone to bed at night, he has taken you very much into his confidence.

"WASHINGTON, CONN., *Dec. 15, 1863.*

"DEAR MOTHER :

"You can't realize how sorry I feel for that great misconduct that happened about a week ago and I want to be forgiven. Will you forgive me this time.

"Christmas is now near at hand and I have concluded to stay here and I suppose you had rather have me to. Mrs. Gunn has just got through reading 'Eric or little by little' and the boys were delighted with it only they didn't like to have the 'hero' of the story die. They expected to have it turn out that he would be a great man : But it did n't. You know that he died on hearing that his Mother was very sick and might die. It ended up very sad and scarcely a boy ceased to cry. It is a beautiful book and impressed several things on the hearts of some of our boys and I realy believe it has done them some good and if it has n't done them any I think it has me. Often in bed I think of 'Eric' and hope that I will never do some of the bad things he did ; but, on the other hand if I turn out to be as good a boy as he turned out to be I will be satisfied and I guess you will to."

Out of such a frank, hearty, kindly boyhood, there matured its natural and necessary fruit. The boy was father to the man. The mature Gibson was no

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disappointment to the hopes of those who had known him in youth. He had all the charm of a perfectly natural and wholesome nature, developing along lines which strengthened constantly all that was noblest and most admirable in it. He was able to express himself fully in his work; and his self-expression constantly broadened and deepened his best qualities.

His exuberant nature continually overflowed in fun. His seriousness was tempered by an unfailing sense of humor, and his tremendous energy was stopped short of oppressiveness by his capacity for play. He had the secret of perpetual youth. He always kept the heart of boyhood. His letters bubbled with mirth. His talk was bright with it. All his friends have memories of this side of his life which form one of the most delightful legacies from that past. But there is no preserving the effervescence of such a nature. It is never the same on the memorial page. His own spirit was so much a part of it all that without his personality behind the joke it would lose half its point. But whether he made sport for a company, as in his droll stories at the club, or raised the laugh in the flow of personal talk, his touch was sure, his humor was contagious.

Probably no trait in him thus throve and grew as did his enthusiasm, his zest in living, his love of what he did, and what he saw, and what he contributed to other lives. To all who knew him he was a fellow of

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infinite zest. He enjoyed life. He enjoyed all lives, both great and small, human and sub-human. A friend used to say of him that Gibson was a man who thoroughly enjoyed *himself*. No doubt he did. For that is only another way of saying that he rejoiced in the things God had given him, the powers which were at once endowment and working capital in his life. No man ever took more keen delight in what is commonly counted the drudgery of toil. He really did not seem to be conscious of the hardship of hard work or the irksomeness of the set task. He so thoroughly loved the thing which he did, that all labor was a labor of love. That took away the sense of bondage to his business, and was one of the secrets of his immense endurance, his elasticity under heavy loads, his exuberance of spirits in situations when most men would have sunk overwhelmed.

He had the trait which marks all such natures, a whole-heartedness in all that he undertook, which made him a difficult man to overcome, to put down, or to defeat. That was obvious in all his hard apprenticeship; in his determined struggle for success; in his loyalty to his own ideals. It came out in some other incidents of his life. His vigorous fight against the spirit of vandalism which threatened the natural beauties of Prospect Park, at the hands of a dense and narrow officialism, was a case in point. In the spring of 1887, Mr. Gibson, in the course of a stroll

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through the Park, was filled with the consternation and wrath which are inevitable in a real nature-lover when he finds that ignorant and unsympathetic hands —and heads—have been busy destroying the natural beauties which years of artificial culture cannot make good. As he wrote in a communication to one of the most reputable journals of the day: "One of the wildest and most beautiful sections of the Park had been invaded by the butcherly Goths and Vandals known as our Park Commissioners. Chaos reigned on every side—beautiful fresh trees by the score, lying in piles of logs among seas of chips, bonfires of brushwood on every hand, and the beauty of the place otherwise hacked and slashed on all sides." Gibson at once sounded an emphatic and indignant warning through the columns of the Brooklyn "Eagle." The Park Commissioners replied through an agent in contemptuous fashion, and declared that all they had been doing was to cut down "a lot of ailanthus trees." They did not know the caliber of their critic. In a second letter Gibson reiterated his charges and showed as the result of actual count and careful identification, that over two hundred trees had been felled in one small acre, and that these included large and beautiful specimens of white birch, black birch, willow, elm, poplar, sweet-gum, flowering dogwood, hornbeam, European alder, nettle-tree, young maple, and numerous other varieties of the minor sylvae, compris-

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ing one of the most beautiful pieces of underwood to be found in any park. The Park Commissioners met this new charge with a square denial. Gibson produced new and indisputable evidence to confute them; induced a committee of gentlemen of the highest standing and intelligence to investigate the premises and the evidences of his accuracy,—including Dr. Charles H. Hall, Dr. Charles C. Hall, Dr. Truman J. Backus, and Dr. Almon Gunnison,—who over their own names verified all his statements. Then the Commissioners were forced to admit his charges (and thus, indirectly, their own untruthfulness), but claimed that what they had done was in the nature of the "improvement" of the Park. Then Gibson challenged the discomfited Commissioners to refer their claim of "improvement" to Samuel Parsons, the Superintendent of Central Park, requesting his expert decision whether this cutting was or was not a justifiable artistic or skilful piece of landscape gardening. The challenge was not accepted. There was no need that it should be. Gibson had roused a vigorous public sentiment which forced the Commissioners to call a halt in their reckless and stupid work; and his absolute honesty, accuracy, and readiness as an advocate had put his adversaries to shame and confusion. The incident is well worth recalling as an evidence of what one honest and vigorous citizen can do in the correction of a public evil. It is even more interesting

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as an illustration of the thoroughness and grasp of his mind on all subjects of which he claimed any right to speak.

His encounters with his critics were often as amusing as they were interesting, on account of the completeness with which he would effect their refutation and overthrow. His very neat rejoinder to that redoubtable critic, Charles A. Dana, was a piquant instance of the care with which he took a position, as well as of the skill with which he defended it. Mr. Dana had taken Gibson to task in the columns of the "Sun," for using the form "witch-hazel" instead of "wych-hazel," which he held to be the correct and original form,—"wych" being an old Saxon word which means "hanging," and has been applied to foliage with pendent stems. Gibson responded in a very brief letter showing that while both forms of the word had sanction, yet that the oldest and the latest botanists used the form which he had adopted, as well as the most reputable dictionaries of that date. His summing-up, in a letter to the "New York Tribune," is too well-turned to be translated or abridged.

"Who then are my authorities? The botanical scholars; Thoreau, Tennyson; The Imperial Dictionary, Stormonth's, Webster's, and Worcester's Dictionaries; and I might add, last but by no means least, 'The American Cyclopedia,' an able authority which presents conspicuously the questioned form 'witch-

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hazel,' and upon whose title-page, by the way, the name of Charles A. Dana appears significantly as editor."

Well might an intimate friend write to him, after such an effective "counter": "Against a literary shot like that, which hits the bull's eye squarely in the center, no 'literary sins' of a minor order can count for much even when they are proved; and no one who has the power to make the shot need be over-modest about his literary ability—he has the essential thing."

Quite as dramatic in its completeness was the refutation to which he subjected a critic of his illustrations, who had accused him of owing much that there was of merit in his pictures to the skill of his engravers. Gibson's own letter tells the whole story and exposes his critic in the fewest possible words.

This is the incident referred to in one of Mr. Roe's letters to Gibson which appears in his memoir (p. 189).

"The Editor of the 'Tribune.'

"DEAR SIR:

"I observe this evening in the current number of the 'Critic,' an art reference which calls for a slight correction. In a review of 'Nature's Serial Story,' by E. P. Roe, after paying a delicate compliment to the illustrations of the volume the reviewer goes on to say that, 'without detracting from the artist's meed of praise, the most remarkable thing about these

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illustrations is the extraordinary skill displayed by the engravers. . . . Mr. Henry Marsh, whose delicacy and precision of touch are marvelous, shows the still rarer power of taking up the theme submitted to him by the artist and adding increment after increment of meaning to it until it becomes almost wholly his own. His engraving of "A Winter Thunder-Storm" is the finest thing in the book. We give the credit to him because we know that Mr. Gibson's forte is not in landscape.'

"I yield to no one in my admiration of Mr. Marsh not only as a master and a poet in his art, but equally as an esteemed personal friend. Indeed I love him too well, and have too great a respect for his interpretative genius to see attributed to him a piece of work which I am sure he would not care to claim, although it is 'the finest thing in the book' and fraught with 'increment after increment of meaning' and which is nevertheless nothing but a photo-engraved plate, by a purely mechanical process. Of course the 'Critic' (?) will hasten to make all due acknowledgments and place the credit where it righteously belongs, *i. e.*, to the Ives Photo-Engraving Company, Phila., Pa., whose admirable process has reproduced not only this, but several others of the illustrations in which the aforesaid alleged marvelous 'increment' was discovered. Such is fame!

"Shade of Albrecht Dürer! Who are our critics?"

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Mr. Roe wrote under date of Dec. 29, 1884: "You did indeed win a victory over the 'incrementitious' critic. I should think he would wish to crawl into a small hole, and pull the hole in after him. I enjoyed your triumph as much as if it had been my own. It was the neatest thrust under the fifth rib I ever saw, and I fear I shall never have enough of Christian meekness not to enjoy seeing a fellow receive his *congé* when so well deserved. Dr. Abbott and I took part in the 'wake' up here."

Another instance of his trapping the friendly critic is preserved in his correspondence. Colonel Gibson had objected to the "Old Barnyard" as pictured in "Pastoral Days." "The sloppy slush through which the man is splashing" he wrote, "is almost too faithful. But, my dear fellow,—an apple-tree in a cow-yard! —and loose fence-posts leaning on it! . . . And do you ever see trees or shrubs on the pond side of a mill?" (referring to the skating scene in the same paper). To which Gibson the artist made answer as follows:

"I have had considerable amusement over my large and most important work at the last display, viz.: 'Autumn at Knoll Farm,' bought first day by Henry Ward Beecher, who says that 'the Colmans, the Giffords, or the Smiths can't beat it.' He tells all his friends so, and in his appreciation of it only sounds the universal praise which it met with; but, mark you!

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Our most high-toned and modern art publication, 'The Art Review,' which employs the finest staff of contributors the country affords, contained in its last issue a criticism that 'did me proud' and at the same time gave me a jolly laugh at the way I had 'fooled' one of our most noted art critics. He went on at the beginning of his 'critique' to condemn lightly the body-color school, claimed that it took away from the atmosphere, 'made mud,' was always likely to hurt rather than improve a painting. He hedged himself however in the statement that 'a skilful hand could obtain a finer effect with 'body color' than an unskilled hand with wash.' But he did not see the necessity of using it at all.' 'Not even for the most bold subjects is it necessary.' . . . 'Take for instance Swain Gifford's (I forget title, but it was a very strong bit of color), rich and full of strength, or even W. H. Gibson's very strong "Autumn," all rocks and tree trunks and weeds and admirable sky, all done with pure blots.' Mark you! Those rocks and tree trunks and weeds were all put in thick with body color, painted over. The result was a rich full texture, that could not have been got in wash without at least much more labor and I doubt even then. Others are deceived in the same way, and I repeat that the result sanctifies the means, and I will guarantee to deceive any critic in the country on the question of body color. I sold

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Late October
From a Painting

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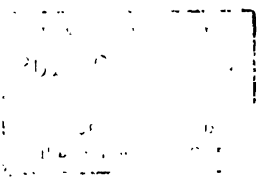

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three of my pictures and it looks as though the rest would go too.

"I am glad you admired my 'Idyl' and especially so that you should have thought to write me about it. It is always pleasant to receive such letters, although unpleasant to think that you are obliged to send such horrible scrawls in return. But I believe you are good at 'puzzles' even if it is a 13.15.14. But you slipped up in your overhauling of that barn with its fence-posts leaning against an apple-tree, and an 'apple-tree in a barn-yard'! Know, my friend, that that apple-tree and barn, with all their 'improbabilities' in the way of posts and apple-trees, etc., were direct from a photograph which I made from nature with my little camera, and all these things were there. The old mill with its 'pond-side trees' was also from nature, and if you will take another look at it, consider these questions meanwhile: What does the mill stand on? Could not a tree grow from the ground at its other indefinite end and spread toward you?"

He was a man of many and warm friendships. It was natural for him to like and to love his fellow-men. He opened his heart and his lips readily to all who came to him in sincerity and in friendliness. But he had special places in his life and thoughts for those who stood nearest to him in sympathy and affinity. The "old boys" of the "Gunnery" were accorded a high place in his heart, and so were those who later became

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his neighbors in Washington. His affection for Mr. and Mrs. Gunn was almost a sacred passion with him, and never waned but rather grew throughout his life. Very tender and beautiful were the expressions of this affection which passed between himself and his old teacher.

No less genuine and tender was his devotion to Henry Ward Beecher, his pastor as a boy in Plymouth, his friend and sympathizer always. His frank and open nature was one to which the warm heart of the great preacher would naturally be drawn; and Beecher's fervid, enthusiastic personality would as inevitably attract and hold the appreciative, impulsive heart of the young artist. There was little danger of misunderstanding between these two. Through all the great sorrow of Mr. Beecher's life, young Gibson was his enthusiastic champion, his loyal friend. His own heart was heavy and hot by turns, over the hounding of Mr. Beecher. He wrote at the close of a letter to his wife :

"Mr. D. worked me up into a red-hot rage this evening, by his insufferable and insulting remarks against Mr. Beecher. If he were a gentleman he would at least have manners enough not to insult Mr. Beecher to my face, knowing him to be my pastor and personal friend."

In a later letter of the same year, he excuses himself for not writing oftener, by saying :

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"My mind has been full of this trouble, not through anxiety about Mr. Beecher's innocence or guilt, but more through my belief in his innocence and consequent pity and sorrow for him. I love him almost as a father. He has done more than I can tell for my spiritual good, and his kindness and interest in me have drawn me close to him."

He poured his whole heart into a letter which he sent with the volume which he had dedicated to Mr. Beecher:

AUTHORS CLUB
"19 WEST 24TH STREET, NEW YORK,
"*Dec 23,'86.*

"DEAR MR. BEECHER :—

"I send herewith the volume which I have taken the liberty of inscribing to you. If you shall find between these brief lines any deeper sentiment than there appears, any grateful acknowledgment of a friendship which I have been fortunate and proud to possess, which I have sought to deserve and which has been most fondly returned ; of thanks for many kindnesses on the threshold of my struggle for recognition, and of your continual helpful and welcome encouragement; of sincere gratitude too toward my pastor, who from earliest youth has quickened my aspirations toward a high ideal of character and a life of usefulness and integrity ;—if you shall discover these and thus learn how close a place you hold in my affections, then you shall read truly the spirit of my dedication.

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"With hopes that the coming Christmas may be blest with peace and joy to you and yours and that your helpful companionship may be spared to all of us with health and happiness to yourself and with continual beneficence to others for many years to come,

"Believe me,

"Yours affectionately,

"W. HAMILTON GIBSON."

An interesting side-light is thrown on a now memorable event in Plymouth Church in another letter, written on the same day on which Mr. Beecher delivered his famous sermon in denunciation of Calvinism, and made his outspoken and unmistakable revolt against the stern dogmas of an older day. There is little doubt that Gibson was one of the quickest and heartiest in the applause which he describes :

"Mr. Beecher delivered, this morning, to an immense audience the finest sermon of his life,—the most eloquent effort, without doubt, that ever escaped his lips. He was heartily applauded throughout the house several times, as he vehemently denounced the right of bishops and other ecclesiastical heads, to usurp authority in the Church. True Christianity, he said, implied liberty. Men should not turn their hearts to Christ through fear but through love. The God that has been and is still preached in the churches throughout the land, is not a god but a devil. If he

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could picture a monster the most horrible and cruel imaginable it would be the God which is preached in many of our churches and to thousands of our people. He maintained his utter independence, and said that no man could say to him what he should do or what he should not do, he was responsible to God alone, and if he was inspired to preach the gospel to his people he would do it with all his heart and all his soul and would give utterance to every thought he chose. 'Men say I shall not, I say I shall.' Christianity, he said, had been trampled under foot by the spirit of ecclesiastical authority, that the time was approaching when liberty in the church was to rule triumphant and until it did the world would suffer.

"His voice rose very high and it was altogether the most eloquent effort he has ever made in this pulpit,—and is so conceded by all whom I have spoken with. I never saw Mr. Beecher when he appeared happier and healthier than now.

"It had been almost decided to send him away on a six months' vacation for rest, but he to-day refused to take it, saying that he did not need it and would rather stay at home with his people as 'they needed his preaching and he needed to preach.' I am going to call on him soon."

To attempt to enumerate the authors and the artists, the critics and the clergymen, the naturalists and the nature "amateurs" with whom he was on friendly

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and even intimate terms would be to make a long catalogue of the most eminent men of his time. It would include such names as Stedman and Stoddard, Beard and Murphy, Abbott and Ludlow, Burroughs and Roe and Ellwanger, Parsons and Alden and the Egglestons. His correspondence included men and women from all over the world. His genius appealed to men of all classes and pursuits—to all who had the simple heart of childhood and its open eye. And that genius was so full of the vitality of the individual, so warm with his own personality, that to admire him as artist or naturalist was to be drawn to him as a man. He seemed to come to people as a friendly interpreter and as a helpful friend, unlocking new gates outward into nature's life, disclosing new horizons, telling new secrets of the Cosmos. The tone of the letters he received from hundreds of unknown admirers shows that he was everywhere held as a personal friend, a teacher who won at once the attention, the admiration, and the love of his disciples.

Two letters from correspondents curiously remote from each other are types of the hundreds who were drawn by the human spirit of his writings to ply him with questions, or overwhelm him with appreciation and gratitude. From the confines of civilization on the north to the boundary of the nation on the south, the friends whom he had made by his pencil and his pen, his art and his scientific knowledge, appealed to

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him with an instinctive feeling that he would understand them, welcome them, help them if he could. Nor were they ever disappointed. The first letter is from bleak Anticosti Island :

"The Lighthouse,
"South West Point,
"*13th May, 1895.*

"Dear Mr. Gibson :

"We hesitated a long time before coming to you with this question. We knew that so many must worry you in the same way, and yet we have come at last like the rest. I can only hope you will forgive us. We live on Anticosti, an island with a very bad name in the Gulf of St. Lawrence. I know you never heard a good word of it. I must beg you, though, to believe that it is as much belied as the toadstools you championed last year. Its woods and plains are full of treasures and among them goodly stores of those same toadstools. They were all under the ban, though, as in other places and we dared only look at them regretfully.

"You don't know how glad we were when you broke the spell in 'Harper's' last summer. I don't think anybody else was so glad. You know we live alone here and try to make friends of 'all out-doors' and anything like this means more to us than to most people.

"For a while then we were happy. We knew you

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and we had faith enough in ourselves to believe that we were able to understand anything you wrote for everyday folks, let alone something that led them among deadly poisons. But very soon we began to fret. Nearly every toadstool we met near home was a Russula and generally far larger and more delicious-looking than anything else we could find far or near.

"They went through every shade of redness and pinkness and pepperiness. I should be afraid to say how often I vowed with pricking lips that I would taste no more. Some 'were not so *very* red or so *very* peppery' and then 'how very far Mr. Gibson must be keeping on the safe side for the sake of stupid people.' I tried cooking some of them though I felt in my heart that they were the same as the rest and found them very good. But every one was, and very reasonably, shy of them.

"At this critical time we came across the article enclosed.

"Here was another excitement. But who was Charles McIlvaine? 'He knows what he is talking about anyway,' I said, 'and I am going to try the whole red tribe'; and I did.

"They were all he said and after a while the others took courage and we even gave some to a friend who had discovered the common mushroom for us.

"I felt misgivings all through the winter, though,

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about the coming season. I did not want to risk unpleasantness and 'emeticus' is such a very ominous name. And who was McIlvaine, after all? Was n't it rash to listen to him?

"And lo and behold you talk now in the 'Bazar' of Captain Charles McIlvaine the eminent mycologist!

"Did you know that he said all that about the Russula? If we follow his advice what risk do we run of making people ill? We don't mind so much about ourselves but we must think a little more of our guests. They are rare enough without poisoning any of them.

"Please give us just a little word of advice, anything you find time to say. And please, even if you cannot excuse this liberty and cannot say anything, send me back the newspaper cutting.

"I never intended to say all this when I began and feel quite ashamed when I look back at the length of my letter. Hoping that you will excuse it, believe me with warmest thanks and gratitude,

"Yours faithfully,

"GRACE POPE.

"W. HAMILTON GIBSON, Esq.,
"New York."

The second letter, a few years before, came from the extreme southwest:

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"San Antonio, Texas,
"Jan'y 13th, 1892.

"My dear Mr. Gibson:

"Will you pardon me, an entire stranger, and a Texan writing to you, but I want to tell you how much I have enjoyed and profited by reading your 'Sharp Eyes.' A good friend sent it from Denver as a Xmas remembrance and each night I read some portion because it is a never failing delight to read of my many familiar friends in Nature you describe in such a clear and delightful manner. Knowing your time is valuable and you are of human patience, though you have the young lover of Nature at heart, I am tempted to ask you to solve for me a problem that has been not only a mystery for several years but an actual annoyance not to be able to find a satisfactory explanation. It is this. Often in winter time we see flies and mosquitoes swollen almost to bursting attached to panes of glass, their little bodies oftentimes striped like a yellow wasp's and surrounding them and attached to the glass is a misty deposit of some kind. It is the cause and object of this misty deposit I seek. If you will enlighten me upon this subject by explanation or reference you will add only one more favor to a large number.

"That you have been the means of adding greatly to the pleasure and instruction of the present generation, young and old, I see from my limited field of observation. That you may be spared many years to

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continue your good work and enjoy the pleasures of God's Nature in this world and reap a rich reward in the Life hereafter is the earnest wish of

"Your sincere admirer,

"ARCHIBALD A. ALEXANDER."

One could add to these indefinitely. A minister in the northwest, a lover of flowers and a true woodsman, has a fine program for a canoeing trip on Minnesota rivers and lakes; a farmer's wife writes to ask direction to some simple manual which will help her copy flowers in color, and encloses some examples of her simple work; an admiring poet sends some verses which will not scan, and will be glad to have her adulations published,—and remuneration secured; another admirer insists that he is not an autograph fiend,—but he *would* like a letter in reply to his praises; an impecunious poet suggests an immediate loan of ten dollars; a mother in a western state sends some admirable sketches done by her daughter and wishes his judgment upon their merits. People felt his kindly nature in his writings and in his pictures. It was a virtue that went out of him, and drew like a loadstone.

Nowhere, perhaps, outside the charmed and privileged circle of the "Gunnery" boys,—they were always "boys" and "girls" to one another!—was he more welcome or more warmly cherished than at the Authors Club. He counted it a great honor to be

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chosen into that favored circle, and as he was one of its earliest members, so he was one of its most constant and loyal supporters. Whenever he could he joined in its social conclaves and its decorous revels; and his presence was always a guarantee of good fellowship, unconstrained, talkative, and sparkling. In the earliest home of the Club in East Fifteenth St.; in its rooms in West Twenty-fourth St.; later in the West Twenty-third St. quarters; and finally in the soaring apartments to which it attained, Gibson's was one of the familiar figures, as it was one of those most commonly sought out of strangers. But it was never a figure with "a certain solitariness," as seen by his imaginative critic. Wherever Gibson sat or stood, there was sure to be a group. Men gathered about him as birds flock to the banks of a rippling stream. Nor was he any slower in coming to the side of others. He sought companionship as frankly as he gave it. He was always running over with bright, attractive talk; but he had a willing ear. He was conscious of his power to attract; but it never bred in him the slightest condescension toward others. He was passionately fond of wit, and humor, and all the honest fun of life; but he never showed a particle of coarseness, and he never confounded fun with foulness. He was as much at home with the largest minds and characters as he was with the simple farmers and rustics, he delighted to describe; for he met all men on the ground of their common brotherhood,

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The Edge of the Woods
From a Painting

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and had no absurd consciousness of external condition and accidental differences to embarrass him. His reverence and his religiousness were profound elements of his nature. He was no formalist. Probably he did not set a very high value upon some of the externals of spiritual life which seem so important to many men. He was, indeed, a loyal supporter of religious works and enterprises, as he was a member of the visible church ; and he paid the highest respect to all that pertained to what is commonly demanded as a mark of Christian life and interest. But he had a life in the Spirit which was larger and broader than all that. He felt and he loved the Divine Life in all that he saw, and heard, and studied, and tried to draw and paint, in the world around him. To his thinking it was all the expression of God ; as such he reverenced the creation. Through this world of nature he was always seeing and feeling the Father. His letters breathe a note of honest devoutness which passes all lip-service. And scattered through his pages are frequent expressions of a spirituality deeper than any words or phrases which so easily become cant. There is a deep revelation of the heart of the man in a passage in "Woodnotes." Listen to his soul pouring itself out in these words :

"Sitting alone in the woods I have sometimes known a moment of such supreme exaltation that I have almost questioned my sanity—a spirit and an impulse which I would no more attempt to frame into words than I

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should think to define the Deity himself—'I am glad to the brink of fear.' My own identity is a mystery. The presence of the dearest friend on earth would be an unwelcome intrusion. The pulses of the woods beat through me. The joyous flight of bird brings buoyant memories, the linnet's song now seems swelling in my own throat. Happy Donatello in the garden of the Borghese is no longer a myth, though even he knew no such joy as this. At such times—and are they not vouchsafed to every true 'Holy-Lander'?—I am conscious of an unwonted sympathy in nature—a strange, double, paradoxical existence, which, while lifting me to the clouds, still holds me to the earth."

It was this inner soul of nature as it filled the inner soul of the man, which he felt a growing power to express in art. But before he could speak his message he passed from our presence.

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CHAPTER IX

AFTERGLOW

FOR many months preceding the summer of 1896, Mr. Gibson had felt himself failing in health. The strain of his long lecture-tours told seriously upon his strength, and several times he suffered from fainting attacks and vertigo, sometimes in the very presence of his audiences. When he withdrew from the city in the early summer, it was with a knowledge that his health was impaired, and the hope, as well, that in Washington, at "The Sumacs," he would find the quiet and the rest which would restore the tone of his system and repair the wastes of excessive work. But this hope was not to be fulfilled. He himself was depressed and apprehensive, and his friends shared his fears. A slight improvement seemed to come with midsummer, but proved illusory. On Thursday evening, the 16th of July, he left his home to go after his mail at the village post-office. Meeting a number of friends and acquaintances he sat down outside the office for a chat with them. He appeared to be in excellent spirits, and for an hour was quite himself. Then he turned to a gentleman beside him and asked if there was anything wrong about his speech.

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He said his voice seemed thick, and that he could not articulate plainly. A book he held in his hand dropped to the floor several times, and he seemed unable to retain his hold of it. Being asked if he felt ill, he said that he did, and suggested that he should walk to the residence of Dr. Ford. His friends prevailed upon him to remain quiet, and one of their number hurried for medical aid. Drs. Ford and Brown soon arrived, and they did all in their power for their patient. A wagon was soon brought to the door, and Mr. Gibson was placed in a chair in the wagon, but before they had reached his beautiful home, "The Sumacs," he had ceased breathing, and upon the friends who had accompanied him was thrown the task of breaking the sad news to his wife and children.

On Sunday, the 19th, occurred the funeral services, a tender and sympathetic account of which was given in "Plymouth Chimes."

"The village of Washington, Connecticut, has been made famous by the 'Gunnery' School, and by Mr. Gibson, its illustrious pupil, who received within its walls the inspiration of his career. The forests, thickets, and hillsides of that picturesque region furnished the favorite subjects of his pencil and pen; and, after he had achieved professional success, he established at Washington, among the friends of his boyhood, his country home. Everybody there knew and loved him, and was proud of him. And when death

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suddenly came to him, it was felt to be an element of mercy in the shock of sorrow, that he was struck down in the midst of happy intercourse with his neighbors.

"The funeral service, held on Sunday afternoon, July 19th, at his residence, 'The Sumacs,' was keyed throughout to triumph and thanksgiving, rather than gloom. The day was bright and cool; birds sang about the house; wild flowers and green branches filled all available spaces; and the crowd of neighbors sat in the pleasant rooms or out on the porch beyond the open door.

"The Scripture, read by Mr. Carter, the Washington pastor, comprised passages descriptive of the glory of God in nature, and of the triumph and rest of the saints. The prayer, by Mr. Turner (formerly pastor at Washington, and now chaplain at the Hampton Institute, in Virginia), was similarly attuned to solemn exultation. The hymns (favorites of Mr. Gibson) were 'Love Divine,' 'Abide with Me,' and 'Upward Where the Stars are Burning'—the last sung exquisitely as a solo; the two others, with scarcely less tender sweetness, by the whole company.

"The address, by his life-long friend, Dr. R. W. Raymond, was, from beginning to end, an expression of gratitude rather than grief. It enumerated the features of the victorious, happy, fruitful, sincere, loving, and devout life which had been sent as a blessing and

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inspiration among men. Several anecdotes were related, illustrative of Mr. Gibson's sympathy with all living things, and of the surprising way in which it was recognized and reciprocated.

"It was told, for instance, how he could take a wild bird from the branch of a tree, caress it, and return it unharmed and unfrightened; how strange birds would fly to him and light upon his shoulder; and how even butterflies seemed to be attracted to him.

"The address closed with a beautiful poem, written for the occasion by Dr. Raymond.

"Through shady roads the funeral procession of carriages and pedestrians passed to the loveliest spot in Washington, the burial-ground, which occupies the side of a hill, commanding a prospect of forest and meadow, stream and mountain, full of peace and beauty. The grave was lined with green branches and fringed with goldenrod; and after a hymn 'The Home-land' and a prayer, the casket was gently lowered into this bower of rest. And then, under the benediction of the sunset, the mortal body of William Hamilton Gibson was left to its repose."

The fine word spoken by Dr. Raymond on this occasion is one which should have a lasting place among the memorials of his friend. It was in such entire harmony with the spirit of the hour, with the memories which were uppermost, with the sense of loss, and the still deeper sense of life enriched and

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The Village Green
Washington, Connecticut

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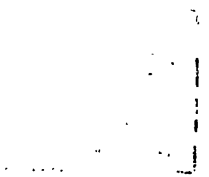

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brightened by the earthly work which was ended, that it was instantly recognized as at once synopsis and echo of Gibson's career. Dr. Raymond said:

"I count it a great privilege to stand here this day, and utter the love and sorrow of so many souls. Words are but feeble expedients for such a task; yet there is, in one respect, a significant choice of words. Shall we express grief or gratitude? Shall we measure our loss by the vacancy it has left behind, or count with joy the treasure we have had, giving God thanks that we had it so long and so abundantly? For my part, I would not desecrate with the wailing of grief this sky of Sabbath peace, or that face of serene triumph and repose. Let us measure our love and our sorrow, then, in terms of gratitude. Thanks be to God for the unspeakable gift to us of a victorious, happy, fruitful, helpful, sincere, loving, devout, inspired life, which, once received among us, we can never lose. Even the nearest and dearest and most bitterly bereaved can comfort grief with gratitude.

"I say it was a victorious life. I knew William Hamilton Gibson when he was a boy; and I knew the struggle of his early life, when, impelled by an irresistible impulse towards art, and nature as its inspiration, he steadily pursued that ideal, 'not disobedient to the heavenly vision,' until, in spite of the warnings of the would-be wise, and the carpings of the would-be critical, he won for himself a recognition

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of his genius and the love and thanks of multitudes whose lives he had enriched and exalted by his work. He accomplished what he set out to do; and I say his victorious life is in that respect a blessing to us, as showing for our encouragement, in these days of change and failure, that a man may still be lord of his circumstances, and, as in the affairs of the heart, so also in the affairs of business, may win and wear his first love.

"But some men gain their victories at heavy cost, and bear always the scars of the conflict. Not so he. His was a harmonious, happy life, attuned to love and beauty and peace, and aflame with joy. And for this reason it was a fruitful and helpful life. There was no power wasted in friction or in blind resistance. He breasted waves of difficulty like a strong, exultant swimmer cleaving his way through the opposing element. Like some gay knight of chivalry, he went into battle with a song. And whithersoever he came —handsome, eager, sympathetic, debonair—he was the bringer of gladness.

"Because he wrought in an atmosphere of joy, his life was peculiarly fruitful and helpful. The record of what he accomplished is indeed amazing. I do not hesitate to say that only a happy man could do so much so well. And that same joyous spirit made him a welcome guest at every fireside and in every heart. What a delightful companion he was! How many thousands

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who never saw his face have nevertheless found in his pictures and his books that bright companionship! Is there anything which the world needs so deeply or welcomes so heartily as such a messenger of hope and cheer?

"In another respect this life was a boon to us. It was a simple and sincere life, frankly and fully expressive of character. Many good and dear people are so reserved or so disguised that their nearest friends do not know them truly. And when we meet them, some day, in the land where we shall know as we are known, we shall have to make acquaintance with them anew, on the basis of the revelation of their real selves. But some there are, whose lives express their souls. Heaven can only make more radiant in them the features that we know already. Will Gibson will be 'Our Will' forever, as he is ours to-day, though death has clothed the dear face in the strange, new 'light that never was on land or sea.' God be thanked for a transparent life!

"But transparent does not mean shallow. This life was deep and strong, because it was a life of all-embracing love and sympathy, and carried the volume and energy of that spirit, receiving also in return, to swell its own current, the tributary recognition of a wider realm than that of the human race. We indeed loved him, as he loved us; but there are many, thank God! of whom so much can be said. The same principle is

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exhibited by few in their relations to the non-human world of life ; and when we see its manifestations, we are astonished or incredulous. I could tell you many stories of the magnetic attraction which this true lover exerted over wild creatures.

"I remember that once, when Dr. Lyman Abbott was visiting him here in Washington, he pointed out a little brown bird in a tree, just over his head, and while he talked, in his own charming enthusiastic way, about the markings of its plumage, reached up into the tree, took the bird from the bough, held it in his hand to illustrate his impromptu lecture, and then replaced it, unharmed and unaffrighted, upon its shady perch.

"Perhaps that bird, dwelling near his home, knew him already. But there could be no such explanation of the incident which occurred far from here, when Mr. Gibson, sitting with friends on a hotel piazza, called their attention to a humming-bird, hovering over the flowers before them, and saying, 'Would you like to see him nearer?' put out his hand, and the little creature, who would scarcely light on a blossom, rested upon the finger of his new friend, and submitted to the inspection of human eyes. Mr. Gibson was himself amazed at this proof of spontaneous trust.

"He used to tell, with a sort of thankful awe, how one day, in Brooklyn, he went through crowded, noisy streets to register his name as a voter, in one of

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those barren, unattractive places which are ordinarily rented by the State for this temporary purpose ; and how, as he stood there in a group of men, waiting for his turn, a white dove flew in from the street, circled round the dingy room, alighted upon his shoulder, received with murmuring delight his caresses, and then flew out. No one knew whence it came or whither it went.

"And he told also, how once he went into the Brooklyn Library, to examine a colored plate, representing a certain butterfly, which he wished to reproduce in illustration of an article ; and how, as he stood with the book open before him, in the dim little corner-alcove which used to be the office of his friend Mr. Bardwell, the librarian, a butterfly of that very species fluttered around the great hall into the alcove, and, hovering above his head, dropped at last upon the book, and folded its wings by the side of its own pictures.

"We smile at such coincidences; but the fact that they happen over and over again to one man suggests a coincidence beyond a mere accident—a coincidence of life with life and love with answering love. Indeed, what do we know of these wild creatures that surround us, and seem to be drawn so easily to some of us? What have we done to lead us to know them? We ignore them, or we chase and trap and slay them, or we imprison them and play with them for our own

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amusement. How would it be if we truly and unselfishly loved them?

"The apostle represents the whole creation as groaning and travailing in pain, waiting for some new manifestation of the human children of God. And the last word of our Master bids us go into all the world and tell the glad tidings, not merely to every man, but to 'every creature.' Is there not, then, an evangel of joy for those humbler companions of mankind? When men shall have advanced so far as to cease hating and oppressing one another, may they not still advance to a true sympathy with all living things? And would not that make indeed a new heaven and a new earth, populous with friendships? Of such a joyous consummation, men like our brother whose life we celebrate to-day are prophets and forerunners. Thank God for them!

"And they may also encourage us to stimulate a love of nature in our growing children. We, who have formed our habits of human exclusiveness, cannot say to ourselves in momentary enthusiasm, 'Let us be as Will Gibson was! Let us begin at once to cultivate the acquaintance of all living things!' We have outgrown the art. We stand embarrassed in the presence of a squirrel or a bird, and, far from knowing how to attract it, are fain to be satisfied if, by doing nothing at all, we avoid scaring it. But our children, rightly encouraged, may develop unsuspected powers

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of sympathy. In the great blessing which Mr. Gibson's work conferred upon us all, the dear old Master of the Gunnery, who cherished into flame the spark of his first inspiration, lived, and still lives, to see the reward of his own loving labors.

"But in another and yet higher aspect, this life was a precious gift to us by virtue of its strong support to our faith in immortality. If all men died in old age, and by slow decay of strength and faculty, it might be hard to imagine the new birth and new beginning which should rejuvenate them. But when a vigorous, full life is withdrawn from our sight in the prime of its power, the very momentum of it carries our faith forward with it. It is like an arrow, shot towards the forest by a strong-armed archer. Has it ceased to move because, in swift mid-flight, it enters the shadow and we suddenly lose sight of it?

"'The avalanche that has slid a mile will not stop for a tombstone!'

"Still another hint of immortality—and a truer one—is given by the character developed in earthly life. Science, it is true, affords us, as yet, no demonstration of a future life. Perhaps we shall always rest for that truth, as we do to-day, upon the word of our Lord, who went and came so easily between the two chambers of the Father's house. Yet science has done much in these later times to illuminate His declaration. It has hinted to us a God, patient and

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tender through the ages of ages, carrying the world upon His bosom and nursing its slow growth, from stage to stage, through crystal, cell, and soul, that He might at last fill the spaces immeasurable with loving and beloved human souls, as dear companions of Himself. He cannot afford, it seems to us, to destroy perpetually the fairest fruits of this long preparation. They have lain upon His heart and felt the pulse-beat of the Universe. He is no Arabian tyrant, to slay them one by one, every morning. Having loved His own, He loves them to the end, and beyond the seeming end—for love is immortality. Our brother, who knew and loved every one of God's trees on these hills of Washington,—shall he not have access to the Trees of Life, that grow by the River of Life? Shall his spirit, attuned already to the divine harmonies of earth, be dumb amid the songs of heaven? Nay; such completed souls declare the Life Eternal, echoing to us the Master's word of hope: 'I live; and because I live, ye shall live also!'.

"For this life of his was already a life with God. You will not misunderstand me, if I say little of that part of his religious experience which is common to all believers, or of that part of his work which we technically call Christian work. It is not because I undervalue repentance, faith in Jesus Christ, or communion and co-operation with His visible church on earth. Still less is it because I need to make out, in

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Gibson's Grave
Washington Cemetery

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behalf of one who found his religion in nature and science and art, a claim to be considered as religious in some exceptional and peculiar way. I could dwell on Mr. Gibson's earnest labors as a member of our Plymouth Church in Brooklyn, as an officer of one of our mission-schools, as a leader of its prayer-meetings, and as a hearty supporter of all its social and religious enterprises.

"Nor shall I speak of what he was to his dearest, in the household. Some of us are better at home than abroad; some of us are less attractive to those who know us best. I can only say of him, that his bright, warm, transparent nature was the same inside his house as out of it; only, they who knew him best received more radiance and inspiration than others. I bid them join in our thanksgiving most heartily, who have been most highly blest. Every stone in this beautiful dwelling, every picture on its walls, every fairer picture seen through its windows, bears perpetual witness of his presence and influence. And in more real and immediate truth, his spirit abides and will abide here. I know it was said, 'The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away.' But that was said in the old, old days, before the light celestial had broken through the valley of the shadow of death. Now we hear a Voice, saying, 'Not as the world giveth, give I. What I give, I take not away!'

"But turning from these views, without underrating

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them, I wish to emphasize, in addition to his love and service in church and home, Mr. Gibson's peculiar communion with God in nature.

"Years ago, his studio here in Washington was in the same house with the study of Mr. Turner, then pastor of the church. It was a happy association for both, and gave rise to many a mutual confidence. And yesterday, talking over with me the experience of those days, Mr. Turner spoke a deep, true word when he said, 'I always felt concerning Mr. Gibson that he walked with God.'

"We are accustomed to think of those saints whose communion is close with God that they sit and meditate, or kneel and pray, or in some way withdraw themselves from distracting sights and sounds, in order to be alone in the Divine presence. Perhaps we do not conceive of walking with God as one would walk with the owner of a great estate, and hear him tell what he had done or meant to do with this field or that. We forget, perhaps, that God is in His world, and that whoso would keep company with Him must find Him there.

"It was of Enoch that it was first said, 'He walked with God'; and in the 'Book of Enoch,' which was so popular a book in the time of Christ, and is quoted in the New Testament, the patriarch is in fact represented as guided by God upon a journey through the universe. It was thus that our friend walked with God.

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" He walked, the friend of every life
In flower or insect, beast or bird;
He knew their pleasure and their strife
Their sorrows shared, their secrets heard.

" Bending their leafy diadems,
The trees to him a welcome breathed;
The blossoms on a thousand stems
To him their deepest hearts unsheathed.

" The bright-eyed squirrel showed him where
Its highway ran along the fence,
And, inly glad to see him there,
Fled, not too far, in shy pretence.

" The tilting songster on the bough,
The callow nestling in its place,
With quick perception learned to know
This lover of their hunted race.

" Around him, like an angel throng,
The countless host of gauzy things,
With airy flight and murmurous song
Unfurled the glories of their wings.

" For the world's life within him thrilled;
And every earthly path he trod
To his responsive soul was filled
With works and ways and words of God.

" Then spake a dearer voice: 'My son,
A life yet wider shalt thou see;
Leave these fair hills of Washington
And walk on fairer hills with Me!'

"Amen! So may we walk with God!"

Other tributes were no less appreciative, and may serve as side-lights upon his inner and personal life. They show how he impressed many men and many

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minds, in various and yet concurrent ways. Mr. Clarence Deming, speaking to the friends and graduates of the "Gunnery" school, emphasized the traits in which he was a type of the best forces inherited from his early training.

"And so to-night it is not Gibson the writer, Gibson the nature-lover and nature-hunter, and Gibson the artist, whom we should be recalling, so much as Gibson the man; and the thought persistently comes back to me over and over again that he was our greatest Gunnery boy, not merely in reputation before the world, not by virtue of pen and brush, but by the fact that he was the perfect and consummate product of the old Gunnery scheme of education, and a kind of analogue of Mr. Gunn himself. If there was one thing sought by Mr. Gunn most strenuously it was the seeding in a boy of those qualities which in him, as man, should fruit into that grandest trait expressed in the English tongue by the word *character*. It is a subtle term, hard to define and to expound. I can, perhaps, call it the power in man compounded by nerve force, habit, and conscience which makes him fearlessly righteous and sets him among his fellowmen in organized society as a living and forceful influence, ever active for things good.

"Now, I repeat, it is on that phase of Gibson's personality and life work that I love to think, and to recall him as our loftiest incarnation of Gunnery character.

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He, perhaps, lacked the initiative force of Mr. Gunn, but when it came to the test of principle not even our old master surpassed the pupil. Do you remember how outspoken Gibson was when it came to any question of wrong? Do you recall how no form of trickery or meanness, either in individual conduct or in public life, failed to meet his contempt and his scorn? What one of us, in that life of his, passed, so much of it, in this community, can put the finger on one questionable word or act? When we can pay such tribute to a departed friend, I care not what his genius may have been, how far and wide his fame may have blown, or how long the mere work of hand and brain may endure, he has builded a monument set firmer than granite or marble in the service of his generation, and of the generations to come.

"That strong character of Gibson revealed itself to me in many ways. In politics, for example, his path and my own on national questions often diverged. Yet in talks with him on that subject, most impressive was the revelation of his bed-rock sincerity of conviction; and never did that conviction fail to be enthused with the profoundest patriotism of motive. Take a somewhat narrower civic question, that of municipal reform, a theme as to which by the nature of personal vocation I have heard many men and met many and varied views. But never have I found a man who discussed that topic more intelligently, more broadly,

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and more often striking the keynote of progress than Gibson, whom the public and not a few friends, doubtless, have associated only with the hunt for nature's secrets in the flower, the leaf, and the marvels of insect life.

"Or let us take one other outward expression of that strong public character of his. It was a primal *motif* in such a man to love the simplicities, and you will all remember as one vivid phase of it his intense desire to preserve the sweet and unaffected community life which has so long marked this village. He had seen how the wave of fashion and of assertive and ostentatious wealth had overcast those New England towns for which nature had done most, and how the supreme triumph of the French modiste, the babble of the four-o'clock tea, and the vanities of so-called 'good' society had come to satirize the summer charms of mountain and river and vale. Hence that aggressive desire of his, expressed alike in word and act, to conserve in their old simplicity and freedom the customs which we as Gunnery boys enjoyed in this gracious village. Though he be dead, that example and precept of his yet appeal to us.

. . . . . .

"Many years ago it was my good fortune to be present in Westminster Chapter House at a meeting to open a fund for a memorial to Dean Stanley. Among the speakers was James Russell Lowell, then our min-

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ister at St. James's, and he referred to an epitaph in a Boston churchyard as descriptive of Dean Stanley's character. That epitaph was simply, 'He was so pleasant,' Many times have I reflected how well that idea described one large side of Gibson's nature. 'He was so pleasant,' so jocund, so genial, so appreciative of humor. One outward token of the trait familiar to us all was his quick grasp of the funny things to be found in this rural New England of ours. We know—and by 'we' I mean especially those of us in middle life or beyond—what a wealth of oddity in phrase and habit our country New Englanders have amassed. Time was when each Yankee village had its quaint and curious characters, but now, with education and contact with the world, they are dying away, and the next generation will see few or none save as they survive in literature. In personal forms Gibson rescued from oblivion many of those characters who went into his books, but the draft was small on his collection of Yankee epigram and oddity which never reached the types. I can see him in memory now, with his rich gift of mimicry, repeating the bucolic joke, or, may be, in smiling silence listening at the post-office as the country sage expounds his original views from the bema of the barrel-head.

"Of Gibson's sweet home life, of his love of wife and family, of his kind hospitality, of his sacred personal friendships, it is not for me to speak in detail

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here. Suffice it to say that they rounded out with rare and beautiful symmetry that splendid life of his as artist, writer, prose-poet, investigator, good citizen, and *man*. In this village of his love, so endeared to him as summer home, and from which, as a Gunnery boy, he drew so much of moral inspiration and strength, no vain words of mine need voice him, nor can language of tongue or pen measure the void which he has left behind. Washington, indeed, is not the same with Gibson gone, and has but the sad boon of still clasping him, mother-like, on the green slope which looks off to the valley of the sunset shadows which he loved so well. We miss, yet meet him, in every nook, in the waving tree-tops, the swaying flower by the rippling stream, in the butterfly that flits by in the sunlight. How well with trifling verbal change do those lines of Whittier fit our loss:

" ' But still we wait with ear and eye
For something gone which should be nigh,
A loss in all familiar things,
In flower that blooms and bird that sings.
. . . . . .
And while in life's late afternoon,
Where cool and long the shadows grow,
We walk to meet the night that soon
Shall shape and shadow overflow,
We cannot feel that thou art far,
Since near at need the angels are ;
And when the sunset gates unbar,
Shall we not see thee waiting stand,
And, white against the evening star,
The welcome of thy beckoning hand ? ' "

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President Almon Gunnison, of St. Lawrence University, speaking out of a long and intimate acquaintance in Brooklyn, wrote of him, a few weeks after his death:

"There have been few men of larger manhood than this poet-artist, this seer and interpreter of nature. He was open-minded and trustful as a child. He loved everything that was manly, and his sense of right was an instinct and a passion. He was tolerant in faith and scorned all narrowness. Reverent, worshipful, a lover of God and man. Not since Gilbert White of Selborne died has there lived one who more minutely discerned nature, and never has there been one more dowried to interpret her. Thoreau had equal skill of vision and perhaps larger grace of literary expression. Burroughs has the same order of discernment, and a like art to make nature interpret her lessons in her own words. But Gibson was poet and artist too; he could sing the song of the daisy with almost the melody of Burns, and could with his deft pencil depict the highway of the squirrel so cleverly that one could hear the echoes of its steps, and picture the hues of the flowers so that one could almost smell the fragrance of their blossoms. He was the most versatile of men. He was a stranger to no form of art. With pencil and with brush, with every form of pigment, he was the master, and with the candle's smoke he made weird pictures which startled admiration. He

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was skilled in every mechanical device. He had most curious charts with cunning contrivances, strings and pulleys, by which he illustrated the fertilization of plants, and would shoot the pollen and would have curious insects flying in the air, to show how nature provided for the perpetuation of her growths. His studio was a museum of the mechanics of art, and had he chosen he could have excelled in many lines of inventive skill. He loved Nature in all her variant moods and forms. There was no flower that he could not call by name, and not a weed held the secret of its life inviolate from him. He could answer 'Yes' to the poet's question, 'Canst thou name the birds without a gun?'; he could go into the forest and the birds would come at his caressing call; he could see into the very heart of every flower, and could write the flora of every State. He loved Nature, too, in her larger forms. The mountains awed and the sea thrilled him with their immensities. He could set the song of the brook to music, and write out the melody of rivers in his symphonies. How well do we remember his telling us of the book which he would sometime make, but which, alas! he never made. It should be the biography of the water drop, and with pencil and with words he would tell the story of the water in its passage from the clouds to the sea.

"He would picture the clouds and the mists, the mountain-tops arresting the fogs and condensing them

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with its ledges; the little springs which run among the hills, the river's cradle among the rocks, the tiny brook descending over the desolation of the heights, the brooklet entering the forest, the mossy coverts, the fern-covered banks, the shadowing trees, the twisting, turning stream, winding downward amidst tawny rocks, jumping over cataracts and falls, then emerging into the lower pasture slopes, with cattle drinking at its banks, and then the meadows with great sweeping branches of overhanging trees, the vexing wheels of mills, the larger and larger river, and then the city with its grime, and beyond, the sea, with its mighty ships sailing to far Cathay. And how his wondrous eyes, which had the luminousness but never the passion of the flame, used to glow as he talked of Nature and of the secrets that she told him and of the apostleship he held to make the great world see and love Nature with something of his idolatry. He kept the gladness of his youth and was never won away from the paths in which his boyish feet had strayed. That wondrous picture-making period of boyhood ever held his soul in thrall. He lived in the city, for he was the busiest worker among men, but the roots of his heart were tangled with the grasses of the sunlit pastures where his youth had been. When the sun's rays lengthened over the noisy city, with the swiftness of the arrow's flight from a Tartar's bow he sought the old scenes, and there at length when

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favoring fortune came, he built his home, and when death wanted him she sought him there, and there she found him."

The minute prepared for the Century Club of New York City was more than a perfunctory record, and witnesses to the high esteem in which the members held him:

"WILLIAM HAMILTON GIBSON, distinguished alike as an artist, an author, and an illustrator, had risen by unwonted industry, native talent, and a tireless enthusiasm to a high place in the esteem of the lovers of nature and the admirers of true art. He was recognized as an artist with the pen as well as with the pencil, and entitled to a place among those enthusiastic naturalists who have the skill in words to impart their enthusiasm. His 'Highways and Byways,' 'Pastoral Days,' the 'Heart of the White Mountains,' 'Nature's Serial Story,' 'Camp Life in the Woods,' 'Trapping and Trap Making,' 'Happy Hunting Grounds,' and many other books, all illustrated by himself, showed his scientific exactitude and his artistic quality. His illustrated article in the last number of 'Harper's Magazine' seems like a farewell message from him in another world. He was also a noted water-colorist, and, in later years, a popular lecturer on natural history.

"His facility of expression and ingenious illustration of his subject by his crayon and mechanical appliances

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instructed and entertained his audiences, and no man had appeared in this field since Agassiz with such success as met him. There was a charm in his personality from the earnestness and kindliness of his nature, and the number of those who mourn his early death is not confined to his personal friends alone.

"Pleasant and unfading memories mingle with our regrets at parting with those whose names are recorded here. They were men without exception worthy, true, and of good report. May we not say, as their survivors, and conscious of our failings—

"'Our lives are albums written through,
With good or ill, with false or true,
And as the blessed angels turn
The pages of our years,
God grant they read the good with smiles
And blot the ill with tears.'

"HENRY E. HOWLAND,
"*Secretary.*

"CENTURY CLUB HOUSE,
"NEW YORK, *January 9th, 1897.*"

Other phases of his versatile spirit are noted by Mr. Alexander Black:

"I first met Mr. Gibson at the Authors Club in the old rooms on Twenty-fourth Street. At that time he was a regular attendant at the meetings, and he remained among the faithful until his lectures began. Thereafter he came, I fancy, whenever he was free to

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come, and found a stimulating enjoyment in meeting his fellow-craftsmen, literary and artistic, with whom at all times he had a hearty frankness of cordiality that made him an always-welcome figure in this singularly democratic group. At times I found him pulling at a 'long Tom,' generally, as he put it, 'in self-defense,' for we hovered in a deep fog of smoke. After I myself had been elected to the Club (in 1888) we met regularly in this literary aerie, and endured in common the recurrent jest inflicted upon those who, at two A.M., still had to make a homeward journey to Brooklyn,—an infliction which fell lightly upon me when I had his company to the Bridge, and could hear him talk of the flowers and their insect visitors, or the current movements of art.

"I believe he always retained an affectionate feeling for the Twenty-fourth Street quarters of the Club, where we smoked, ate the Captain's salad, told stories (Gibson not a poor contributor), seldom talked shop, and certainly never were literary; where we met Lowell, Stedman, Boyesen, Eggleston, Grant White, Godwin, Stoddard, Conway, Jefferson, Riley, Kipling, Mitchell, Hay, St. Gaudens—it would be a long and an interesting list. Mr. Gibson's genius and personality alike attracted to him the attention of the choicest spirits in a gathering of this kind. He always had a fine fund of that quality which belongs to genius—which is in itself a genius—a quality of youth-

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ful enjoyment in the simpler pleasures. I remember the contagious gusto with which, on a certain memorable Watch Night, he told the company a ghost story that came to its crisis in a materialized ghost of his own making which he had concealed under his coat. The hoax recalls some of his fun at Washington village, where his astonishing mummy with a message from the past will long be a droll tradition, and where there is a lively recollection of his dashing horsemanship on a wonderful steed with a feather-duster tail!

"I heard him lecture at Washington village and shared in the delight of an audience whose youngest members he held quite as closely as their elders. Indeed, I never have known in any department of science or of art an enthusiast who could convey, with an utter absence of academic formality, so rich and delightful a fund of information and suggestion. To me he was always the ideal interpreter of nature. There was no hint of book covers between. He did not turn to and from his theme at any time. It was part of his life—and plainly a pleasant, unstrenuous part of it. In the woods, in his garden, on the quiet porch overlooking the hillside sumac, he spoke of a discovery in a petal or in the habits of a beetle with that charming undidactic delight of one who assumes that all must have a common pleasure in these phases of natural life.

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"As an artist he was quite as free from personal mannerisms or eccentricities. When I first visited his studio on Montague street, Brooklyn, he talked as he worked—the picture was an illustration to one of his magazine papers,—and afterwards turned to his portfolio, quite without the effect of entertaining me, but always with a companionly frankness and simplicity that made him at all times the most attractive of hosts. I remember his house studio on Lincoln Place by but two visits, and I had no greater acquaintance with the little crib at the foot of the Washington lawn. I think I liked the dishevelled workshop at Washington best of all.

"Mr. Gibson never permitted the very handsome things that were said of his writings to disturb his relation to his artistic ideals. 'I am an artist,' he said to me when this subject came up between us, and profound as was his affection for plant and insect life, it was as an artist that he looked across the leaping lines of this Washington country; it was as an artist that he labored to transmit with his brush the flame colors of autumn or the lustrous prophecies of spring. The healthy ideals of his art and the hearty simplicity of his nature are to be read in the unmannerish charm of his pictures.

"Once or twice we met on the trains in the course of our lecturing work. He had stories to tell me of his own experiences — of hardship, of accident, of

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humorous incident. Once his voice left him so completely that he was obliged to make a momentary exit after a pantomimic apology to the audience. On the whole I think that he greatly enjoyed his lectures. Certainly they were inspiringly memorable to those who were privileged to hear them.

"When I recall him in his own home and in mine, I have before me a splendidly strong head and figure. I hear his strong healthy laugh. I see his broad shoulders turned to me as he sits at the piano playing the 'Largo' with a full singing volume of tone. His ear was so keen and sympathetic that he could express without knowledge of notes even the subtler harmonies of a fragment like the 'Largo,' and his playing always had the fascination that is present in the interpretations of those who truly love music, and who find in an instrument a companion to whom they may go in any mood with certainty of response.

"The news of his death brought to me a shock and a sense of bereavement deeper and more lasting than any I had known for many years. Here, surely, was a fine spirit, a lover of life and of art, and an exponent of all that is sanest and sweetest in both."

It was four years after his death that the Alumni and friends of the "Gunnery" school completed a memorial of Gibson which for fitness and significance is one of the most successful in America. On the left of the road, as one climbs the long hill from the railroad

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station to Washington Green, nearly at the top of the slope, there stands a large boulder, a little back from the highway. Here it was determined to place a bronze medallion in bas-relief, which should aim to suggest the man and commemorate his relation to the little town which he so loved and which so loved him.

The report of Mr. E. K. Rossiter, made to the Alumni Association, tells the interesting story of the inception and completion of this loving task, whose results will be an enduring memorial of this inspiring life.

"You have undoubtedly all heard of that ideal committee composed of three persons—one dead, one in Europe, and one left at home to do as he pleased. But my parallel, if I draw one at all, must soon end, for though Mr. Van Ingen is to-day on the other side of the water, the other two members, Dr. Lyman Abbott and Dr. Ludlow, are very much alive—as proof of it, I would refer you to the weekly issue of the 'Outlook' or beg you to attend one of the good Doctor's sermons at Orange.

"We have acted, it is true, at arm's length from each other and our work has been accomplished, strange as it may seem, without so much as once meeting as a committee of the whole. We have, however, been in frequent correspondence and from the beginning there has been nothing but a unanimity of feeling. It was Dr. Ludlow, I believe, who first

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The Bronze Memorial

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suggested that this Memorial take the form of a bas-relief. He keenly appreciated the fact, as did we all, that Gibson had conferred, through his work, an unusual distinction upon our little town and having stood, as he quoted from Oliver Wendell Holmes, next to Thoreau in his appreciative portrayal of nature it was not only fitting but incumbent upon us that he should be remembered in some enduring way — in some way that would enable those coming after to know the manner of man he was to us. Therefore when Mrs. Van Ingen pointed to a huge boulder at the lower end of the Cemetery nestling among the trees he loved so well, there seemed nothing further to debate beyond securing a sculptor.

"In this matter it was deemed essential that we should find one who knew our friend. For while an artistic success might readily be obtained by a score of men, we were aware that that indefinable something—that quickening spirit animating a man's whole being and constituting his personality—was likely to be in a measure lost without the immediate contact which artists seek. It was just here that our good fortune became again manifest; for our covetousness was rewarded by finding in Mr. Bush-Brown the sculptor of our search. Behind him stood the personal knowledge, and, what was equally fortunate, a most excellent photograph by Smales. I cannot regard this snap-shot picture other than a portion of our

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rare good luck, for it gives us Gibson as we knew him—in his out-of-door garb, and in the very act, too, of his devotion to nature. It has enabled the modeler to produce a likeness, which I believe future generations must instinctively feel as good—just as we of to-day looking at the engraving of Shakespeare in the original folio edition of his works instinctively feel it is scarcely more than a travesty of the poet, that man of infinite fancy and wit. But since Shakespeare's time, the graphic arts of expression, more particularly of engraving have progressed to such a degree of perfection that it is quite possible now to attain to the subtlest degree of an artist's thought. Likewise in sculpture is this attainable—so much so that we shall to-day be able to read in the unveiled bronze the individual characteristics of the one whom we would portray.

"I was pleased in looking at the Medallion last week to discover a butterfly hovering over the convolvulus vine so accurately preserved and so gracefully worked into the composition—because as you will remember this was the emblem of immortality with the Greeks — a most appropriate symbol, too, in this instance ; for when you come to think of it, Gibson was in spirit a good deal of an old Greek himself. He was one in his joyousness, in his large and passionate appreciation of out-of-door life, and more than all in his love of the beautiful. Beauty of form and color as

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he saw it in nature was a sort of visible divinity—a palpable happiness, heaven come down to earth; he viewed it in the conception of Gautier, the French poet —as an all-pervading yet delicate mantle let down by God to cover the nakedness of the world for the delight of his children. Of this mantle he always found enough to clothe his pictures with poetic truth, nay, more, for into the fine vesture of his thought he frequently wove a scientific fact of such intrinsic value as to win renown as a naturalist.

"Other boys will leave this Gunnery and we hope win as distinguished laurels as did Gibson; for is it not, as James Russell Lowell has said of Harvard, all but impossible to rub up against these walls without taking away something that no other institution can give? But be this as it may, it is not probable that there will soon be found among the Alumni a man of such rare versatility. The combination of his gifts has been recognized far beyond the confines of this little hamlet; but because it was here that he began his life's work, here ended it, here that he made his home, and here that the mortal part of him lies near us, it seems particularly appropriate we should erect an enduring memorial to his worth. For how few of us who have dipped into his books or followed him in our walks but can repeat the words of the blind man of old, who in the ecstasy of a new vision cried 'Whereas I was blind now I see.'"

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William Hamilton Gibson

Who Nature loves by Nature is beloved.
  She makes him gentle, and she keeps him fair;
  By woods and waters where her treasures are
Within his hand she lays a hand ungloved.
For him no stream is stopped, no mountain moved,
  No bird-song hushed, nor any branch made bare;
  Useless the archer's shaft, the fowler's snare;
Nor for his feet is any pathway grooved.
So Gibson lived and wrote, and drew and dreamed,
  Whose sun too early dropped adown the west,
Whose every day with purest visions teemed,
  That gave another's day a fresher zest;
And like dear Nature's self he often seemed
  To draw no lines twixt labor, play and rest.

Rossiter Johnson.

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NOTE

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"The American Agriculturist."

"Hearth and Home."

"Appleton's Encyclopedia" (Botanical Drawings).

"Picturesque America."

"Success with Small Fruits," E. P. Roe.

"In Berkshire with the Wild Flowers," Elaine and Dora Goodale.

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"The Pictorial Longfellow."
"Sketches in the South," Charles Dudley Warner and Rebecca Harding Davis.

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